

about this book . . .

- What are signs and wonders?
- Do they happen today?
- Can we cause signs and wonders to happen?
- Are signs and wonders and gifts all in the one bundle?
- What were the purposes of signs and wonders in old times and are their purposes the same today?

In this book, *God and Man in Signs and Wonders*, the author—Geoffrey Bingham—has opened new insights and provided valuable information concerning the purposes and powers of such things as the Word of God, works, deeds, signs, wonders, and the use of the gifts of the Spirit—all under the guidance and control of that Holy Spirit himself.

It is a useful book to read. Similar information does not seem to be available, and this alone makes it worth the reading.

Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, writer, missionary, teacher and family man, as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live. Some have found his books life-changing.

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GOD and MAN in

SIGNS and WONDERS

Geoffrey C. Bingham

God and Man in Signs and Wonders

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Christ's People in Today's World

The Day of the Spirit

Spirit-Baptism: Spirit-Living

The Wounding and the Healing

The Splendour of Holiness

Christ's Cross Over Man's Abyss

Dry Bones Dancing

The Heavenly Vision

Christ the Conquering King

Geoffrey Bingham

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FOREWORD

ON THE TRAIL OF SIGNS AND WONDERS

Church life can be very prosaic and dull. The institutionalized church can have many excellencies, but can also be mediocre and even boring. 'Let us then', we say, 'pep it up a bit! Let us introduce what is current and relevant'. Maybe some polite entertainment, maybe some topical material for our sermons, and a little humour. Perhaps we can see how the others are going and learn from them. We might even have a jazz mass—old hat now!—or a bit of heavy metal rock. A beat could hep us up a bit! So we say.

Not all go that way. Some have a better sense of history, of tradition, and even of decorum. Some are faithful to the apostolic truth and practice. Search out then the elements which so enlivened the early people of God. That they were enlivened is in no doubt! They lived to the throb of God's heart of love. They were entranced by the grace of God, and rejoiced in prayer, loving fellowship, rich unity and sharing their goods and lives as one unified people. They lived under grace—and they had to!

They had their problems—many of them, in fact—but they lived a rich and powerful life together. They were literally a gifted people, a people empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, a people proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

Time has made its inroads into the church of God. Some churches have become overly institutionalized. Others have become dull because they have lost the joyousness of grace. Others are, frankly, highly equipped organizations. Some live without love, and many without power. Yet the same principles obtain as have always been in the world, namely self-justification, competition with other groups, and the activity of being counted alive and successful.

Thus we espouse something we call ‘church growth’. The biblical kind of church growth is not to be discounted, i.e. ‘Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love’ (Eph. 4:15–16). There is, however, another kind of church growth, namely the expanding of the numbers of members, stewardship of money, increase in respect—to say nothing of envy—by other churches, and the kind of promotion that spells real success. This is the kind of church growth we need not aspire to attain.

Every so often someone comes forward with a discovery which has helped his church. It may be a new liturgy, a new kind of worship, the ability to attract young people, social ministry to various groups in society, the technique of neighbourhood Bible study groups, cell groups,

house churches, marriage and family fellowship camps and teaching, and many others. Any one of these may prove quite valuable, and all of them may have some virtue. Whatever the case they ought not to be thought of and used simply to enlarge the number of people who attend. Somewhere along the way the Gospel will prove an offence to some, and caring for numbers may cause us to temper what we say, and so much so that the keen edge of the sword of the Spirit may not be felt. What then is the value of numbers in the face of pointless compromise?

Be all that as it may, we now have a new goal in sight, namely the use of gifts, the practice of body life, and the dynamics of doing signs and wonders. Since this was all part of life in the early church we must in no way demean or seek to discredit it. What we do need is a theology of the use of gifts, and participation in the matter of signs and wonders. Of course theology—as such—will of itself do nothing, but in respect of knowing the nature and purpose of the gifts, works, deeds, signs and wonders it can be very helpful and even interpretative.

Having worked in a missionary situation in which revival brought with it all the dynamics of works, deeds, the gifts, and signs and wonders, I have great respect for our subject, and the substance of these things. What I do not respect is a human attempt to develop such things into workable techniques in order to stimulate church growth. Some say, in protest, ‘Yes, but numbers and power are the name of the game!’.

God forbid! Let the world have its way—that way— but let us realize that what matters most is the telling out of the word of God, and the things which rightly follow its faithful proclamation—whether it may happen to be

growth in our churches, a deepening of true spirituality, or just plain opposition and hardness.

I have been enriched by the study of these things. That study did not begin with this book, but goes back many decades. Even so, a bit of intensified research is most enlightening, and I have learned much in these past few weeks. I hope this little book—as they all say with due modesty—may also be helpful to readers. A study of signs and wonders on its own would prove to be of limited value, but where the primacy of the word of God is seen, accepted, and followed, then it can be most fruitful and useful.

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CHAPTER ONE

**AN ESSAY ON
THE GOD WHO ACTS**

TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY

It was that night when the shepherds were in the fields, keeping watch over their sheep. Suddenly—though not anticipated—the glory of the Lord shone around them. That most wonderful fear that comes to us as humans when God Himself breaks into the normal routine of our lives, gripped these men whose chief matter in life was to care for sheep.

We can see them falling to the ground before that great and holy glory. In the midst of that glory there was an angel, the great angel of Israel's history, for he was both at once the angel of the Lord—a manifestation of Yahweh Himself—and the angel of Israel, the protective and guiding angel of the ancient shepherd-people, the angel who had appeared as God to them so many times, guided them through the wilderness, for 'in his love and in his pity he [had] redeemed them; he [had] lifted them up and carried

them all the days of old’.

By this same angel God was—in past times—to give them the most holy law out of His own bosom, at Sinai where they would tremble in awe and reverent fear. He was to be with them in their battles and in their great triumphs.

He was to be the hand of the living God, moving in protective covenant action.

What must have struck them so powerfully that night was that God had not forsaken His ancient covenant people. Bitter it had been to be taken away from their land amidst excruciating cruelty and so made to be strangers in foreign places. Even when the miracle of the return had taken place, when the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple had happened, there were still the invasions of the defiling invaders. How they had longed for the inviolable peace of Jerusalem.

Now—to their great joy—was the Lord in their midst.

The angel said,

‘Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord . . .’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!’

EMMANUEL

The great joy to Israel was that God was with them. He had come to them, personally, assuring them He was in

their midst.

He had come as Emmanuel—‘God with us!’.

He had come in the form of a babe.

The Babe would grow, and become a man, moving amongst God’s holy people, showing them that God had not forsaken them, that indeed He was with them. This would be great joy to them.

They were to see God in love and pity as He again redeemed them, only this time—forever!

They would see their God come to the guilty and the lost, to those gripped by guilt, haunted and oppressed by the devil—the plaything of demons. They would see the sick and the leprous, the bewildered and the sinful, and they would see His hand upon them not only in pity but in liberating mercy, for His people were to be a joyous people.

They would also see the great event of the Cross, although at the point of its happening they would not understand it—so shameful it would seem. Their anger and rage at God would break out in the event of the Cross as a sign to the whole world of its bitterness against God.

The Resurrection, however, would bring God’s true people to marvel. Their joy would be unbounded as salvation poured out to them from the sheer grace of God.

GOD ON THE MOVE

That is how it happened. Suddenly from heaven came the marvellous outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit. In hours thousands came flowing into the Kingdom of God. The timid group of fishermen had become as holy lions and

roared out the proclamation of redemption. God was with them. Emmanuel had come, and had been taken from their sight to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on High, but he had not departed from them—his servants. He was to remain with them until the present age would come to its consummation. He was still 'Emmanuel'.

History, now, was to be in the hands of Jesus its Lord. High over all great powers and authorities he was to reign supreme. And so he now reigns supremely.

This they did by 'word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit'.

Yet at times they ask, 'Is he indeed high above all? Does he truly reign by the authority of the Father? Has he indeed triumphed over all the forces of darkness?'

They ask this when thousands of them are butchered because of his Name. They ask it when the Sanhedrin denounces those first apostles, when their beloved Stephen is murdered, when James their companion is put to death. They ask it as they wander the earth, telling out the good news, but being imprisoned for it. They ask this in the face of the bitter persecutions of the first few centuries, the later persecutions in the many lands which they invade. They ask it in the face of persecution which takes place against them in the Name of their very Lord!

They ask it in the face of the savage and murdering Islamic hordes, erasing the people of Christ from Arabia and North Africa. They ask it when Sulimen the Terrible decimates the Armenian Christians in a hideous genocide. They ask it in countries overrun by pagans, by butchering monarchs, by wild tribes. They ask it in the face of a persecuting medieval church, and of traditional churches which would confine worship and the Scriptures to a

powerless traditionalism, and a church so often at ease, dead when it knows it not, and cold in its formality and lovelessness.

Sometimes they cry from under the altar—the martyred saints of God—'Lord! When will our blood be avenged upon them?'. They are told to wait a little longer until the roll of the martyrs is completed, until the Gospel is preached to every nation, for only then will the end come.

It is not in cynicism they cry, for they know their God is the living God. He is long-suffering and of a great kindness. Men and women can count His long-suffering as salvation, for He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

He has always been long-suffering, and of great kindness since He loves the world He created. Long before time He had planned its redemption. He had planned it should be delivered from the curse that came upon it through the sin of man. He had planned His elect people should be holy and blameless before Him, having become His sons through grace.

He had planned that He—the living God—should dwell in the midst of His people, they being His holy habitation, the true Holy City, the place of perpetual worship, glory and joy.

He had planned all this because He was ever—and is ever—the living God.

THE LIVING GOD

From Him flows all life, hence the singers cried, 'All our springs are in you!'. The prophets said, 'He is the

fountain of living waters!'. Others simply said, 'He is the living God! In Him we live and move and have our being, but in us—as persons and a people—He lives and moves and has His Being!'

They meant, 'Our God does not hide Himself. He is not bound by the universe He has created. He is not cut off from action by the laws He has set for His creation. Whenever He wishes, and in accordance with His most Holy Self of love, goodness, holiness, righteousness and truth, He acts as He wills. He acts according to His eternal wisdom, never faltering. He fulfils all things according to the counsel of His own will, and nothing may prevent that. He is not locked into His own creation so that He is bound by it. Nor is He locked out of that creation, so that He cannot be in it at His own will'.

He is the living God!

THE LIVING LORD OF ALL HISTORY

So we see Him, moving in our times and our places. He moves in creating His most beautiful universe. He gives signs in the sun, moon and the stars. He shapes man in His own image. He gives warm living intimacy to the man and the woman. He tests them at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but is not dismayed by their fall. He pronounces coming salvation—defeat to the Enemy and liberation to the men and women of faith. This He will achieve by the seed of the fallen woman!

He gives grace to the first murderer, and does not destroy him, though such may be deserved. He creates a

prophet—martyr of the murderer's brother. He watches the growing corruption and violence until He must act in the judgement of the Flood. He promises uninterrupted rhythm, of seasons—seed—time and harvest. He takes an idolater and makes him the father of many nations and many people, and gives him the ultimate covenant of grace. He comes in the person of His own angel, and speaks and converses with this—His humanity, His people for a possession.

He acts in accordance with His own covenant of grace and delivers His people from the oppressor—Egypt—and does this with mighty signs and wonders.

His people—scarcely recognizing Him—wait with mixed fear and joy as ten plagues show Him to be in their midst. They fear Him as the holy God of covenant. They see so much, but think so little concerning Him though He shows them His presence as He journeys with them in a column of shekinah smoke by day, a pillar of shekinah brilliance by night.

He is with them in His tabernacle and later in His temple, sitting between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. He is with them in the words of their leaders, priests and prophets. He does simple indicative signs along with great signs and wonders, especially in the times of their greatest need. He says continually, 'I am the Lord your God who dwell in your midst'.

Whilst He lives with His holy people, He is above all the people of the earth. By Him kings reign, and kings and emperors meet their demise and become senseless dust in the desert. By Him peoples grow, flourish and then wane. His eye is over all the earth. He keeps evil at bay where He will, and uses it as His wholly controlled

**THE GOD OF SIGNS AND WONDERS
AND WORKS OF POWER**

sheep dog to worry and control the wayward nations.

He comes to Israel in its times of need—need of judgement, need of mercy—and works according to His most perfect will, and always with His covenant in mind.

He comes in His only Son—he who was ever the Eternal Word, the Son by whom He created all things— and He brings him to dwell in flesh as the True and only Emmanuel—God with them, God with us!

In His pity He redeems not only Israel, but the nations of the world. He moves in intimate detail and act and brings His world to its most glorious climax, judging evil on the one hand, and fulfilling all righteousness—for ever —on the other.

GREAT GOD OF WONDERS!

The hymn writer could not withhold his amazement and —perforce—wrote:

Great God of wonders! all Thy ways
Display the attributes divine;
But countless acts of pardoning grace
Beyond Thine other wonders shine:

Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?

This too we ask, when we contemplate the history of creation, the planning of God, His inestimable wisdom, His creative and redemptive purposes. By all these things we know He is the living God—acting according to His own perfect will.

Not even the pagan thinks that his god lacks power. Most —if not all—religions come to this belief: God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. The way they spell out those elements of God determines the forms of their belief.

In fact—apart from superstition and senseless mumbo—jumbo—who really believes God acts personally, warmly and unceasingly within His creation? Some refuse to believe in Him as a personal God. Others see Him as endlessly confronted by evil. Yet others see Him as Creator and even Redeemer but refuse Him personal action within His own creation.

He must remain out of it. He may reign above it, but not be in it. He may—indeed must—control its destiny but not by His presence or His intimacy. The God of the deists is above His creation, having set it in action, pre—determining its end, but coldly staying out of its domestic fuss and foolish actions. The God of the atheist—the God who causes this person such endless anger—is close to the God of the deist, but the atheist knows God ought to work at every point of history and in unceasing details. It is simply that the atheist does not see what God does, because God does not do it in the way the atheist thinks He ought to act.

The indolent religionist thinks God ought not to be so bothersome—indeed so uncouth—as to enter His own creation. One can never be sure what might not happen, and what might! Besides, such irruptions are tiresome. One can never be sure of the order of things! Having set out a ‘fixed order’ He ought—in all decency—to adhere to it.

Also such unpredictable actions interfere with the planning of man.

The humanist is as indignant about God as the atheist but he prefers scorn to the atheist's 'God-obsession'. The miraculous is foolish, and signs and wonders are irrelevant. Man has within himself the power to accomplish all that is needed in order to create his own secular 'kingdom of God'. If marvels are to be done then let them be real and not the induced figments of human imagination. Let there be signs and wonders, mighty works and marvels, but let them be done by man! Even then let them be done in decent and rational ways. They can be done- when they are needed!

THE BELIEVER AND HIS LIVING GOD

Men of faith have always believed the creation belongs to its Creator. They know He will move in His creation as He wishes.

They thrill with joy when they see Him move in history- not merely as in cause and effect-but as the great Initiator of all things true and moral.

They delight that He should come to them in angelic forms, in rich and wonderful theophanies. They rejoice when He speaks personally through covenant, law and prophecy. They gaze with solemn awe and reverence when He comes in strong prophetic denunciations and clean and decisive judgements.

They view with wonder His judgements of plagues, of signs and wonders, delivering His people but bringing judgements to His intractable opponents. They see these

judgements also as forms of mercy, drawing people away from their own evil.

The actions of the living God in history delight them for without those actions they might think He does not care for His creation and its peoples. Revelations of fiery chariots and hosts of heavenly creatures-hitherto veiled but now revealed-fill them with awe and wonder. To them it is as beautiful a thing that God should walk Enoch home with Him as He should take Elijah to Himself in such chariots of glory.

The history of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is part of the history of the everyman of faith. Israel's re-lease from Egypt, its wanderings through the wilderness -all attended by signs and wonders-are not mere encouragements to the people of faith, but the very corpuscles of their arterial blood. The world of prophets, priests and kings intimate with God is not a strange world to the people of faith.

The world of Messiah, coming as King of the Kingdom, healing, liberating, doing signs, wonders and works of great power, and-above all-declaring the very word of God Himself, is not beyond the scope of their faith. In these things they delight.

In the days of Pentecost, and the events that followed, the people of faith have always been the agents of God's signs and wonders and mighty works. They are those who have used the holy gifts of Christ and his Spirit and brought liberation to men and women by healings, miracles, liberations, exhortations, admonitions and prophetic revelations.

By works that are holy and good and true, they have honoured the Lord their God and their ever-present-

though presently unseen—Emmanuel. Their worship is undeniably of the nature of truth itself. They adore their Father, worship their Lord, and do it all in the Holy Spirit and in the truth He has made real to them. By worship and works they serve the living God. By signs and wonders and gifts they demonstrate and reveal the presence of that living God.

Such people of faith are here upon the earth today. Whilst evil powers mimic the powers of God, and evil forces seek to deceive multitudes into their way—the occultic way of so-called reality—the true believers live by the word of God, and exercise what spiritual powers and weapons He has given them. None of those do they do—or ought they do—by their own independent volition. As humble as were the apostles so ought we people of faith be now. On the one hand we must have no idolatry of power—operations, nor on the other lack of faith in His present actions. As the early believers lived in God, so must we, and only at the point of His urging should we do such deeds and acts as He requires.

The temptation to power is the Fall of man relived. Christ was no macho deliverer, but one who spent nights in prayer to live intimately in the will of His Father. He gave no carte blanche mandate to his servants to ‘Go, get it! Go, do it!’. The word was, ‘Go . . . and lo! I am with you always!’.

A PRAYER

Great God of wonders, we do not worship Your acts, but You. We do not covet your gifts, but we love You—the

Giver. We do not desire to have greatness and power to heal us from our innate weakness, but we do desire Your power to be seen throughout all the earth. Attest to Your most powerful and saving word by giving your servants boldness to utter it. Attest to this word by signs and wonders. Keep Your people by Your most gracious gifts. Keep them from pride when You work. Save them from thinking they have done it! Cause all they do to be true worship of Your most holy Being.

Glorify Your name in all the earth, O You who work wonders through the Son who suffered and died, bearing the sins of all, and making intercession for such transgressors.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ATTESTED ONE– ATTESTED BY SIGNS AND WONDERS

‘Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know–this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.’

These words spoken by Peter on the day of Pentecost were addressed to the covenant people of God to inform them that the man they had crucified some six weeks previously was really God’s true man, since he had been attested by God Himself. The attestation was that God Himself had–through this man–done ‘mighty works [*dunamesi*] and wonders [*terasí*] and signs [*semeiois*]’.

By doing these God had attested to Jesus, so that al–though the act of his crucifixion was a stumbling block to believing him to be the Messiah of God, yet his deeds certified he was of God–no less the mighty work of his resurrection. God, in raising this crucified man, has finally sealed him as the man sent by Him to Israel.

Peter is really saying that had there been no mighty works, no wonders and no signs then Israel could have rejected him legitimately as its Messiah. Because of the signs and wonders it must now believe in Jesus. Later, in Acts 10:38, Peter repeated the same principle: ‘. . . how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him’. His ‘doing good’ and ‘healing all that were op–pressed by the devil’ were proof that ‘God was with him’, i.e. that he was the authentic one of Isaiah 61:1– the one anointed by God’s Spirit to do such things.

The principle of attestation is seen in regard to the word the apostolic team later preached at Iconium: ‘So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands’ (Acts 14:3). In Acts 2:22 God ‘attested’ Jesus (*apodedeigmenon*), and here in 14:3 He ‘bore witness’ (*martuounti*). The first verb (*apodeiknumi*) can mean ‘to attest, designate, proclaim, constitute, appoint, approve or prove’ as in Acts 25:7, I Corinthians 4:9 and II Thessalonians 2:4. The second verb (*martureo*) means ‘to testify, to bear testimony (in confirmation: Acts 14:3), to give evidence’ as in John 1:7, 8; 3:11, 32; 4:44; Acts 6:3; 10:22; I Timothy 5:10 (‘well attested’).

We may conclude then that signs and wonders were the means by which God attested both Jesus and his followers as being of and from Himself. In particular Jesus was attested as Messiah, and the word spoken by his followers was attested as being the word of God.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MATTER OF SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE SCRIPTURES

INTRODUCTION: SIGNS, SIGNS AND WONDERS

The term 'signs and wonders' is found some twenty-seven times in the Old Testament. It is found nine times in Deuteronomy alone (4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 13:1, 2; 26:8; 28:46; 29:3; 34:11). In the Old Testament the word 'sign' is just that—it is a sign, i.e. a mark (Gen. 1:14; 4:15; Num. 2:2), a reminder (Gen. 9:12; Josh. 2:12; 4:6) or a work of God as in the plagues visited upon Egypt. The word 'wonder' in the Old and New Testaments indicates some act of power that is generally supernatural. Signs are not always supernatural, but they generally point to God or His acts.

The word 'sign' (*oth*) is used with 'wonder' (*mopheth*,

pala, pele, temah), and for this reason the term ‘signs and wonders’ has come to have a standard meaning and use. Israel saw God as ‘majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders’ (Exod. 15:11). God was ‘the living God’, i.e. doing acts and deeds, not withdrawn from His people and indifferent to them. The other gods are not creators, therefore they have no control over this world. God does, for He is Creator and He acts in His creation as He wills, though always for its good. The other gods cannot break into the ‘fixed order’ of creation (Ps. 148:6; Jer. 31:35–36; cf. Gen. 1:31; Eccl. 3:11) and effect supernatural works and deeds, but Yahweh can. He can control history in this way—if He wishes—but His actions of this kind are comparatively rare.

Jeremiah 32:18–22 gives us the rationale of signs and wonders:

‘O great and mighty God whose name is the Lord of hosts, great in counsel and mighty in deed . . . who hast shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and hast made thee a name, as at this day. Thou didst bring thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror; and thou gavest them this land, which thou didst swear to their fathers to give them’.

In other words the use of signs and wonders is not merely God using His ‘supernatural’ as against man’s ‘natural’—as though God has the advantage and were using it—but it is God’s good use of the powers He has in order to promote His glory and the advancement of His creation, especially in history, and His designs for His covenant people.

The term ‘signs and wonders’ seems generally to designate those prodigies, miracles and wonders which God did—and does—to make known to men and other powers His purpose and His power, and so to effect the plan which He is working out. There seems to be good reason to understand the meaning of the term in the New Testament in the light of its use in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER FOUR

**SIGNS AND WONDERS
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Deuteronomy 4:25–41 requires study. In verses 32–35 we read:

‘For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him’.

This statement, together with the statement (above) of Jeremiah 32:18–22, gives us the principle of signs and wonders in the Old Testament, i.e. that God was proving

Himself to be the God who worked as He willed to accomplish His purposes, and who was neither locked into nor out of His own creation, thus being able to do as He wished. ‘Do as He wished’ is not to be thought of in the sense of petulance, but in the sense that God is free to work out His sovereignty the way He wills, which, of course, is the best possible way—it being according to the (wise) counsel of His will. For God to be limited by inner laws of His own creation would be an incredible and foolish thing. Whilst Jeremiah 32:20 suggests that signs and wonders had continued in Israel from the events in Egypt to the present day (the day of Jeremiah), yet there are three main periods of signs and wonders, (a) the time of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and of its being in the wilderness, (b) the times of Elijah and Elisha when the nation had entered into apostasy, and (c) the times of Daniel as Israel faced—in exile—the political powers of the day. This is not to say that God throughout history has not done signs and wonders of many kinds— for He has—but these are not recorded as evident steps in the history of salvation.

We now look at these three periods.

**Signs, Wonders and Deliverance
from Egypt**

(i) Signs and wonders began in Egypt, being first mentioned in the book of Exodus. The plagues visited upon Egypt are called signs in 4:28, 7:3 and 8:23. We note these signs are salvation for the people of Israel (Jer. 32:21; Deut. 6:22–23), but are judgements for those of Egypt. They are proof that the gods of Egypt are helpless

against Yahweh. In Deuteronomy 4:34, 6:22 and 7:19 the deaths of the Egyptian first-born, the crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army verify God as the God of true power (Neh. 9:10).

(ii) Signs and wonders continued in the wilderness. Having rescued Israel from Egypt, God warns His people against disbelief, seeing He has attested Himself by signs and wonders: 'How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought amongst them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you [Moses] a nation greater and mightier than they' (Num. 14:11–12). God's doing of signs demands belief in Him.

The pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night was a supernatural sign of God's presence. His presence meant not only salvation for them (Ps. 78:42–43) but also preservation (Josh. 24:17) and worship, for the tabernacle signified the centre of that worship.

There are also providential signs, such as the continuous giving of the manna (Exod. 16:13f.) and the quails (Exod. 16:13; Num. 11:16–35; cf. Ps. 105:40), and the miraculous giving of water (Exod. 17:1–6; Num. 20:1–13; cf. Ps. 105:41; I Cor. 10:4).

A number of events in the wilderness further reveal the purpose of the signs. In Numbers chapter 12 Miriam was struck with leprosy (cf. Uzziah's similar event in II Chron. 26:16–21) because she was high-handed in her judgement of Moses. In Numbers chapter 16 (cf. Jude 11) there was a supernatural judgement of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—along with other protesters—because they sought equal status with Moses and Aaron.

Judgements by plagues are seen in Numbers chapters 16 and 21. In these cases signs and wonders are judgements against those who do not believe and obey God.

When Israel began to invade Canaan there were unusual events such as the dividing and heaping up of the waters of Jordan (Josh. 3:7ff.), the fall of Jericho (Josh. ch. 6), and the standing still of the sun (Josh. 10:1–15). These, however, appear to have ceased once the land was truly settled.

The Days of Elijah and Elisha

At this point in Israel's history the prophets play a special role. Elijah and Elisha do not have the authority and ecclesiastical leadership exercised formerly by Samuel but they are needed to speak to the monarchy, and to restrain Israel from total apostasy. Their lives are a prophetic witness or sign to the people. Jesus' commentary on Elijah and Elisha in Luke 4:24–27 enrages his listeners, for its main burden is that Israel would not receive Elijah and Elisha, and as a sign against Israel

God sent them to those outside of Israel—the widow and the Syrian leper Naaman. We note in passing the significant raisings of the two sons (I Kings 17:17–24; II Kings 4:18–37). The miracle of the falling fire at Mt. Carmel was a sign against the worshippers and 800 prophets of Baal and the Asherah. It is difficult to know how God's name could have been vindicated at that time and situation apart from a sign and wonder. The translation of Elijah was not only a miracle but a sign from God that his ministry had been acceptable, i.e. an attestation in the face of the opposition the prophet received, as well as

a healthy encouragement to the school of the prophets.

The Times of Daniel

This time of exile was painful for Israel, who had been wholly humiliated. We need to read Daniel chapter 4 to see how Yahweh was vindicated, and—for that matter— His servant Daniel and his companions. The salvation from the fiery furnace of the three young men, of Daniel from the lions' den, and predicted judgements of the kings make this period in Israel a significant one, and draw attention to the place of God in the history of nations, as well as the coming of the Son of man, or Messiah.

Other Old Testament Times of Miracles

Some see the translation of Enoch as a miracle, but it might have been simply the entrance from this life to the next. Romans 4:17 seems to confirm that the birth of Isaac to aged parents was a miracle. The returning of the shadow ten degrees on the sundial of Ahaz (Isa. 38; cf. II Kings 20:8–11), is another rare miracle. Likewise the healing of Hezekiah's sickness is another isolated event (II Kings 20:1–11). There are also the many theophanies—manifestations of the glory and intention of God—which in themselves must be seen as miraculous. In one sense, of course, nothing need be regarded as miraculous, especially if it is seen as the way God is pleased to act at any point of time or location within His own creation.

OTHER ELEMENTS CONCERNING SIGNS THEMSELVES

Signs and Wonders a Right Part of Divine–Human Existence and Experience

We might as well observe here that the Hebrews¹ did not think in terms of events, things or happenings as being 'supernatural'. When what we would call a miracle took place they regarded it as being part of the world of creation. In fact nothing happened which was not within the creation, i.e. there was no new element which appeared. The ten plagues were all manifestations of known elements, i.e. frogs, flies, blood, darkness and death. The Hebrews saw no reason why God should not act as He wished at any point of time or place in order to work out His own purposes. They saw Him as neither shut in nor out of His creation but as Sovereign Lord of it all. They took His signs and wonders as being part of His self–revelation, His encouragement to His people, and His judgements on those who opposed Him. This world to them was not an ironclad system, nor was history simply man caught in a squirrel cage. They knew man could make his own decisions—for good or ill—so why

¹ When we make such observations as, 'the Hebrews did not think', 'the Hebrews saw no reason', we do not mean that the Hebraic way of thinking is simply interesting to us today as though it were one amongst many ways of thinking. We mean that being the people of God, the revelation that came to the Hebrews and the early Christians is the way one ought to think, for this is part of the Judaic-Christian revelation, i.e. the way of truth, the way that is wholly ontological. We recognize that historically many influences have sought to alter or condition this way of truth, and so we are grateful for the Scriptures which help us to understand the way of truth.

was God not able to do so as well? The only wrongness of seeking signs and wonders was when man was tempting—i.e. testing—God to get Him to prove Himself by such signs and wonders. This kind of action was pre-sumptuous and really arose out of disbelief.

We might also observe that for the Hebrews the unseen world of celestial creatures was part of God's entire creation. Whilst there was some phenomenal difference between the seen and unseen, there was no essential division. Angels were servants to God and to God's people—as men also were servants to God and His plan—and their manifestations, or the manifestations of heaven, whilst unusual and awesome, were not those of a world entirely other than the known and seen creation. In animistic societies and cultures this understanding still obtains. Spirit creatures are thought to dwell in the midst of the present creation and to have relationships with creation and its creatures—including man himself.

Signs and Their Meaning Apart from Supernatural Actions

So far we have dealt with signs and wonders which are regarded as having something of a supernatural element, but there are some signs which are not directly connected with wonders, and which do not have direct supernatural elements. Just as supernatural actions were God's communication of Himself to His world, so also He gave other signs. These might be called 'teaching signs' for they were intended to inform man. In Genesis 1:14 the sun and moon are to be signs, i.e. they signify the seasons, the day and night, so that as they are read they

prove useful for human living, plant cultivation, and the like.

Some signs were warnings, such as the mark of Cain. There were also signs which were reminders: the rainbow was to remind man of God's continuing covenant to allow the 'fixed order' to continue without a judgemental interruption of a flood. The red thread or rope hung from Rahab's window was a reminder to Israel that she—Rahab—was protected by God. Various piled stones or cairns were reminders to agreement-makers of their obligations. Circumcision was a covenantal sign which God gave to Israel as a pledge of His initial grace to them and of its continuing nature.

Sinai itself was a sign of God's fulfilled promise to liberate Israel in the exodus. God enabled Moses to authenticate his mission to Israel by certain signs. Again, in Judges 6:16–18 Gideon asks the presence of the Lord to remain as a sign whilst he goes away in order to bring back a sacrificial offering. He also asks for the signs of the wet and dry fleeces and is granted them.

Prophetic messengers also used signs to indicate the nature and message of God's word to the nation. Whilst there may have been some 'wonder' element in Moses' rod or staff, and in Gideon's fleeces, yet the signs the prophets used were for the most part quite ordinary. Thus in I Kings 11:29ff. the tearing of Jeroboam's garment by Ahijah the prophet is a sign that the kingdom of Israel will be rent in two. Isaiah (8:1–4) was commanded to have a son and give him the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz for he was to be a sign that 'the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria'. Isaiah (20:1–5) was also to walk naked for

three years 'as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia'.

The prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos were also commanded to do various acts which were to be signs, i.e. the playing out-through a form of drama-of the prophetic messages which had been given them to deliver to the nation (Jer. 19:1ff.; 27:1ff.; 32:6ff.; Isa. 37:30; 38:7, 22; Ezek. chs. 4-5; 24:15ff.; Hosea chs. 1-3).

A CONCLUSION CONCERNING SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We have seen that God communicates with man by the use of signs and wonders. Far from being deistic, He is present to every atom and molecule of all His creation all the time, giving them natural signs, such as the sun and the moon, covenantal signs such as the rainbow and circumcision, and prophetic signs which tell of His intentions for Israel and the human race. Sometimes His signs are marvellous and cannot be put down to the natural order as it normally-and usually-appears to work itself out in the course of events. Such signs actually affect humanity for good or otherwise, and effect God's purposes as He has planned them.

All of this matter of signs and wonders is an operation from God and not from man. Man cannot effect such signs. God always takes the initiative. Even so there are times when a person can pray for signs, such as in the case of Gideon and the wet and dry fleeces. Doubtless faith without signs is excellent, but since God gives signs

they are not to be thought to be a lesser way of faithful living than what we might call 'signless faith'. It was signs which caused Moses to become the leader of his people, i.e. the sign of the burning bush, the power of his rod to become a serpent, and the hand which became both leprous and was restored to normal. Israel was constantly led by signs and grateful for the fact that it knew God's presence by such marks and acts of God.

Equally we must recognize that God's word was to be taken as given. Signs were not greater than His word but simply His gracious attestation of that word. It must never be required of Him to prove His faithfulness to- and in-that word, for such would be tantamount to tempting (proving, trying out) God and questioning what He had already said. Such an action must always be wrong.

An Evaluation of Signs and Wonders in the Old Testament

We have said that God's action in signs and wonders are to show His hand in moving for the sake of His people, His promises to them, His covenant with them, and His holy Name. We now repeat our thesis mentioned previously, i.e. that *whilst there is a 'fixed order' in creation it does not mean that in signs and wonders God goes beyond this order, but moves within it*. He never does something which is innovative, or a work of creation beyond creation. It might be said that God works 'supernaturally', but then to do this He works within the 'natural', i.e. the creation as it is. Even so He shows He is not governed or limited by His creation; that whilst it

flows functionally, that functional operation is by no means an end in itself.

At the same time He does things which human beings cannot do, and shows His power and His intention. His signs are signs, i.e. events which happen which are in-tended to be read by friend and foe alike. If Egypt is sensible it will recognize the sign and soften its heart. It does not, so that the sign now becomes a sign—and an action—against Egypt. It could have been a sign for Egypt. At the same time it is an act for Israel against Egypt. It is judgement for Egypt and grace for Israel.

That is what we must see, i.e. that the element of judgement is always present in a sign, as also benefit and blessing is present for the true people of God. It is this that prompts Gideon to ask at the time of the Judges, 'Pray, sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this befallen us? And where are all his wonderful deeds which our fathers recounted to us, saying, "Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?" But now the Lord has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian'. From this we gather that Israel would always have wished God to show His hand in signs and wonders, reassuring them of His power and of His concern for them. This seems to have been a legitimate desire, and in fact is echoed in Acts 4:29–30 in the New Testament. In Gideon's statement there is implicit the thought that the absence of signs and wonders from God means some sort of judgement on Israel, or neglect of the nation on God's part.

Again Jeremiah is clearly saying in 32:16–22 that God not only delivered Israel from Egypt, but has gone on in history—even to Jeremiah's day—doing similar signs and wonders *when they proved to be necessary*. If in

Israel they do not expect signs and wonders continually, they certainly desire God to do such when crises come! The lack of continuing signs does not mean that God is not with them, for God has His own mind and wisdom in doing them as also in refraining from doing such.

We are then brought face to face with the question, 'Would a continuing process of signs and wonders be necessarily beneficial for Israel—as also today for the church—were such signs and wonders to become part of the process of life under God?'. Surely the answer must be that whilst God has done signs and wonders from time to time, such actions and works are not part of a stereo-type. Indeed such a stereotype could even become harm-ful. Life under God is always a matter of faith and not of sight. If signs and wonders are demanded of God by His people in order to assure them that He is present, then He is not present primarily to faith. The fact of biblical his-tory is that God's intervention by signs and wonders is quite limited. To ask God to prove Himself is in fact tempting God. To insist that He is absent when signs and wonders are not performed is to miss the real meaning and purpose of these acts of God.

A Prayer for Renewal of Signs and Wonders and the Marvellous Acts of God

In Habakkuk 3:2 the prophet said, 'O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and thy work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years renew it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy'. He was saying, in effect, 'O Lord you say you will come in

judgement on our land, and this I believe. Your judgement will be terrible for us, but we must accept it. Yet Lord I ask you to repeat—in our history—the things you once did in Egypt and at other times. Do a new and similar work now. By all means bring your judgements upon us, but in your wrath remember mercy, and liberate us from our enemies, judging them, and releasing us as you did in Egypt so long ago'. If this paraphrase is correct then it gives us a view of their understanding of God's signs and wonders and the element of judgement attending them.

We have little reason to believe that the principle of signs and wonders differs in Old and New Testaments. It would appear that the meaning, intention and significance of signs and wonders in both is similar.

PROPHECY OF SIGNS AND WONDERS TO COME

For the most part those who are of Israel look back to what God has done in history by His continuing acts, signs and wonders. If looking back is greatly significant to Israel, then looking forward will certainly be no less significant. Whenever God personally intervenes in the life and history of His people, then that proves to be remarkable.

The first set of prophesied signs and wonders relates to Messiah. Later we will see that Jesus directed John the Baptist to look at such Messianic predictions, for in essence he referred him to passages such as Isaiah 29:18–19, 35:5–6 and 61:1–2. These predicted signs and wonders

were acted out by Jesus in his Palestinian ministry.

The second set of signs which we call 'eschatological', i.e. a coming time of signs and portents, were prophesied in passages such as Joel 2:30–32. Acts 2:14–21 shows us that such prophesied events partly happened on the day of Pentecost but that there were (are) still special events yet to come. It is an interesting fact that in a number of places signs were predicted by Jesus and his followers which relate to the coming Day of the Lord (e.g. Matt. ch. 24; II Thess. ch. 2), and these comport with Joel 2:30–32 as explained in Acts 2:14–21.

When we say 'eschatological' we mean the last events of history, the climactic happenings which bring history to its consummation. Whilst in one sense the time from Pentecost to Christ's parousia (i.e. his final appearing) is the era of the Spirit, and will naturally involve the ways in which the Spirit works, yet the eschatological signs are mainly clustered around the final events themselves. They are intended to indicate that the last events are happening.

Since both the Messianic and eschatological signs are predicted, it must mean that they are of real significance, and—as such—ought not to be taken lightly. What we ought not to conclude is that there will be a general and continuous run of such signs and wonders from the time of Pentecost to the parousia of Christ, for this would go counter to the principle of the doing of signs and wonders which we have seen in both the Old and New Testaments, namely special acts of God done at special times for the special purpose of judgement upon God's opponents and the liberation of His elect people.

CHAPTER FIVE

**SIGNS AND WONDERS
IN THE GOSPELS****SIGNS AND WONDERS IN OLD
AND NEW TESTAMENTS**

As we have suggested above, it is scarcely likely that signs and wonders would differ greatly in their significance from the Old to the New Testament. If we approach the New Testament with the idea that the signs and wonders done by Jesus and the apostles are of another order than those done by God in the Old Testament, then we may fail to understand them fully. Linguistically we note that in the New Testament the Old Testament 'sign' (*oth*) becomes *semeion*, and 'wonder' (*mopheth*) be-comes *dunamis*. The coupling of 'signs and wonders' remains the same as in the Old Testament, the term being used at least sixteen times and—we suggest—with much the same significance.

**SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE
SYNOPTIC GOSPELS****Classes of Signs and Wonders
in the Synoptic Gospels**

One point we need to keep in mind when seeking to understand the use and significance of signs and wonders is that Jesus' acts—i.e. his miracles and healings—are not called 'signs [*semeion*], and wonders [*teras*]' in the synoptic Gospels. In fact the term 'signs and wonders' is used once in the synoptic Gospels, and then only of the works of false prophets (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22). Even the term 'miracle' (*dunamis*—called a 'mighty work' in RSV) is not used for Jesus' acts apart from one chance utterance by Jesus regarding a person who might do a miracle ('mighty work') in his name (Mark 9:39). There need be no quibble about referring to Jesus' acts as 'signs and wonders' because Peter referred to them as such on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22).

Another point for useful consideration is that in the synoptic Gospels, signs were asked of Jesus by those who opposed him, and he would give none but that of the prophet Jonah—i.e. the sign of his death and resurrection, which—incidentally—helps us to remember that this is the sign of signs. Whilst Jesus' refusal to give signs does not denigrate signs and wonders, it warns us against a wrong use of them. If the soteriological sign is the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. I Cor. 1:21–23), then the eschatological sign will be that of 'the Son of man in heaven' (Matt. 24:30), and whilst we cannot say with certainty what it will be, yet the elect will certainly

recognize it, and then all 'shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory'. Thus we see there are only two authentic signs– so nominated–in the synoptic Gospels.

Yet another key for our thinking is that the eschatological sign/s will be those acts which cannot be done by men, i.e. Christ's coming and the close of the age (Matt. 24:3–31), since they will entail movements in the heaven: 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken' (Mark 13:24–25).

The signs and wonders which believers can do find mention in Mark 16:17f., and if for us this fragment of the Markan Gospel is acceptable, then we may take it into consideration. There is no question that signs and wonders were done in the early church in accordance with Mark 16:17f., but that does not canonically authenticate the Markan text. The calling in question of the canonical value of this text simply requires us to be conservative in the respect of what it states that believers will or can do, i.e. we ought not to build up a theory and a practice of doing signs and wonders based mainly on this Markan statement.

Some readers of Scripture see the Markan statement as supported by John 14:12, namely Jesus' assurance to the disciples that they would do even greater works than he – Jesus–had done. The text in John does not say the disciples will do greater signs and wonders, but greater works. We will later see in John's Gospel that whilst all signs and wonders are works, yet not all works are signs and wonders, so that the Johannine text is not equivalent to the Markan text, nor even wholly supportive of it. This

fact needs to be taken into consideration when working out a methodology of doing signs and wonders, if indeed, there can be such a methodology.

A further useful point to keep in mind is that the Synoptic Gospels' only actual mention of signs and wonders is of those which will be done by false prophets (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22). There may be some link here with Matthew 7:21–23 where those claiming to do signs and wonders are called 'evildoers' or 'workers of iniquity'.

The Signs and Wonders Jesus Effected in the Synoptic Gospels

Whilst it is true that Jesus' special acts are not called 'signs and wonders' or even 'miracles' in the Synoptic Gospels, yet Acts 2:22–23 makes it clear that they are. Even so we should keep in mind that the writers of these Gospels do not make anything–as such–of signs and wonders. Of course the three years of Jesus' ministry were remarkable for the actions he did, i.e. the signs and wonders which he effected. It is obvious that innumerable events are not recorded in particular. Generally when certain events are described in detail then it is because the writers of the Gospels are making a special point about that particular happening.

Jesus miraculously liberated many persons possessed by demons, including those whose sicknesses were attributed to these demonic powers. When in Acts 10:38 it is said that he healed those 'who were oppressed by the devil', it is not said specifically that all were ill by satanic and demonic actions. In practical fact he healed those

who were lepers, who were blind, lame, paralysed, deaf-mutes, and he raised from the dead some persons who had died. He fed 4,000 on one occasion and 5,000 at another time. He stilled the violent storm, walked on the water, changed water into wine, cursed the barren fig-tree, told of a coin to be found in a fish's mouth, and caused the miraculous draught of fishes. These are some of the many special, remarkable happenings which were recorded concerning him.

The Immediate Effects of the Signs and Wonders

We notice the effects of these signs and wonders within the immediate context of the Gospels, namely that all of these signs and wonders were of direct benefit to those who came under them, i.e. they were healed of their sickness or liberated from the demons which had been exorcised by Jesus. They were not merely exercises in promotion or propaganda, but happenings which brought relief and liberation to sufferers. In this sense they signified the gracious and liberating nature of the Kingdom of God, and were not merely demonstrations of supernatural power.

We also notice that at the same time the demonstration of healings and exorcisms (signs and wonders) brought into judgement those who did not heed them, for in Matthew 11:20-24 Jesus pronounced judgement on the cities which had not heeded his signs and wonders. He informed them that on the judgement day they would be in a worse state than Sodom and Gomorrah, and indeed

we are reminded of Egypt and its obdurate resistance to God's signs and wonders in its midst. Signs and wonders must not be taken for granted. They are special actions of God which must be seen, considered and accepted, with awe and obedience.

The third thing that we see is that the powers of darkness were defeated as people were healed, liberated from demons, and cleared from guilt (cf. Luke 10:18-19; Matt. 12:28; Acts 10:38). This diminished the power of the forces of darkness over human beings. In one place this is described as Satan falling as lightning from heaven (Luke 10:17-19), and in another place as Satan-the Strong Man-being dispossessed by the Stronger than the Strong Man, Jesus (Luke 11:20-22).

The Significance of the Signs and Wonders in the Synoptic Gospels

The signs and wonders pointed to Jesus as Messiah and affirmed his Lordship. This is seen in Acts 2:22-23, for it is referring to the events recounted in the Gospels: 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know'. Again in Acts 10:36-43 there is a further attestation-on the basis of the Gospel accounts-of Jesus being Messiah. Verse 38 says, 'how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him'. 'Doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil'

certainly points to signs and wonders.

In Matthew 4:23 we read, 'And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people'. This certainly sup-ports what is written in the paragraph above. The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom was at one with healing.¹ Likewise in Matthew 12:28 we see a similar statement of principle: 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you'. In other words such healings and exorcisms attest to his being Messiah.

This comports with Luke 4:18–19 (cf. Isa. 61:1) when

¹ NOTE: The statement, 'The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom was at one with healing', must be fully understood. We are not saying that without the healing of all who heard there was no true preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom, anymore than we are saying that when it was fully preached all were healed (cf. Mark 6:1-6). In passages such as Acts 10:38 and Luke 4:18 (cf. Isa. 61:1), the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom brought deliverance from satanic oppression. Such oppression was not always in the form of illness or even demonic domination. 'Me woman who was a sinner was 'saved' or 'healed' of her sins by faith (Luke 7:47-50). The Greek verb *sozo* ('to save') in the Gospels is sometimes translated by 'to heal' or 'to save', and can mean 'to deliver' or 'to heal'. What we are saying is that wherever Messiah proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom there was deliverance for his hearers in whatever form that he-Messiah-deemed to be necessary. We ought to see that true healing is not limited to deliverance from sickness even though it may happen to include it; nor does the healing of a person from sickness necessarily mean that person has received salvation. Salvation is by the Gospel and nothing else. Whilst healings and other signs may attest to the word of God (the Gospel) and to the proclaimers of the Gospel, healing is not one of the essential ingredients of the Gospel. If we miss the fact that the Gospel is not an entity in itself, but is in fact God personally redeeming His people, then we will tend to make the Gospel a self-working power which operates in a stereotyped fashion, e.g. if we think that all illness has to be healed, healed in a certain way and at a certain time, then we will look upon the Gospel as a means of healing and regard it as utilitarian. The evil of man, the rightness of judgement, and the utter gift of grace will be lost in the face of a deficient view of God's holiness

Jesus says he has been anointed with the Spirit 'to preach good news to the poor . . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the accept-able year of the Lord'. In Luke 7:18–23 we read the account of John's uneasiness as to whether Jesus was the true Messiah or not. Jesus' immediate response is de-scribed by Luke: 'In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them [John's disciples], "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" '. This statement of Jesus was a blend of Isaiah 29:18–19, 35:5–6 and 61:1–2, which are all Messianic passages speaking of signs and wonders.

Whilst John 5:36 and 14:10–11 are not statements within the Synoptic Gospels, yet they help to interpret the fact that Jesus did nothing of himself much in the same way as he—in the Synoptic Gospels—attributes his work to 'the Spirit of God' (Matt. 12:28) or 'the finger of God' (Luke 11:20); his works were ones which the Father did through him, from within him. Thus we are led to the following conclusion:

Jesus was Messiah and attested to by God by the works which He-God-did through him. He was Messiah, anointed by God for the work of signs and wonders. He as Messiah did the works of the Kingdom such as 'teaching . . . preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people'. Such were the signs predicted and

predicated of Messiah in the prophecies. These were accomplished by the Spirit, for by the Spirit he cast out demons and healed, thus pronouncing (the action of) the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom at once emancipated men and women from their own personal evil, and defeated the evil powers of the world system which had held them. The signs then were an attestation of him as Messiah, as also they were the very works of the Kingdom of God.

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

In John 20:31 an explanation is given of the signs: 'these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ [Messiah], the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name'. This can be understood by the reading of 2:3–3:3 for 'many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to them'. The signs were intended to be read, and reading them would have shown Jesus to be the Messiah of God's Kingdom. Those whom Jesus did not trust were those who had not read the signs. They had seen only miracles. Had they read the signs then they would have known Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, in which case they would have believed and received eternal life.

As it was, Nicodemus had to be told that without being born again ('being begotten from above') he could not see the Kingdom of God, let alone enter it! He who is in the Kingdom knows the Kingdom's Messiah.

The Signs in John's Gospel

Prior to Christ's resurrection there are seven signs in John's Gospel which he did. They are as follows:

1. Water turned to wine (2:1–11).
2. Healing of the nobleman's son (4:46–54).
3. The healing of the paralytic beside the pool of Bethatha (5:1–15).
4. The feeding of the 5,000 (6:1–15).
5. Christ's walking on the sea (6:16–21).
6. The healing of the man born blind (9:1–12).
7. The raising of Lazarus (11:17–44).

Following the Resurrection there was the further miracle of the draught of fishes in 21:9–14.

If we take the first 20 chapters of John to be the first draft of the Gospel, and consider the number of the signs –seven– then we will see that the signs were of the complete number. Perhaps any set of seven could have been as useful.

Jesus' signs are works (*erga*), but they are the works of the Father (5:36; 9:3; 10:32, 37; 14:10). Jesus does such works in his moral obedience as the Son of the Father (4:34), and through them witnesses to the Father, i.e. the truth of the Father (14:6; 18:37), but the works also testify to him, 'for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me', and 'believe me for the sake of the works themselves' (5:36; 14:11). Thus his works or signs bear witness to him that

he is the Christ, the Son of God. At the same time their aim is salvific: 'these [signs] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name' (20:31).

When we seek to read the signs in general we are conducted to the truth of Jesus being Messiah. When we read them in particular we see aspects of his Messiahship or of the nature of the Kingdom. The sign of the wedding at Cana in Galilee was the truth that Jesus had domestic care for a wedding about to fail. The transmuting of water to wine may have been symbolic of the change of sinful humanity to a new creation. The healing of the noble-man's son was an exercise in true belief, i.e. not just 'miracle faith'.

The four signs that followed were deliberate. The healing of the paralytic on the Sabbath showed that Christ works on the Sabbath to repair the ravages of sin—as does the Father. The feeding of men with bread pointed to the true Heavenly Bread—Christ himself—without which a man will die. The blind need the light. When the light of the world is refused then men get themselves irretrievably caught in darkness.

The final—and we may say fatal—sign was the raising of Lazarus from the dead, the sign that Jesus is the true Lifegiver. So powerful was it that the political Jews knew it would destroy the nation as the people would seek to make Jesus their king.

Signs and Works

There is an important point we must keep in mind. Whilst in John's Gospel the signs point to his being the

Messiah, the Son of God, yet it is not only signs which he does. In fact John records so few signs. It would appear that it is works to which Jesus keeps drawing attention. Whilst all signs are works, yet not all works are signs. It is a profitable exercise to read through John and pause at the places where works are mentioned. Whilst signs are to be read and are directions concerning the Kingdom of God, yet works testify no less than signs. Works often do not have a miraculous element, but they are all valuable. When in John 14:13 Jesus told his disciples that the works he had done were (are) a powerful witness, he then told them they would do such works and even greater works. Such works, then, would not necessarily be signs and wonders, but would probably include such. In John's Gospel three things are of great importance and seem closely linked and related—the word, the works, and the signs.

We have said that all signs (*semeion*) are works, but that not all works (*erga*) are signs. If all signs are included in works then we have one view of works. What then would be works which are not necessarily signs or miracles or wonders? The answer is 'Everything that Jesus did'. In John 17:4 Jesus said, 'I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do'. The work is surely composed of the works— including signs and wonders. His works were for him to be the good shepherd, the living bread, the light of the world, the door of the sheepfold, the true vine, the shepherd, the way, truth and life of the Father, to reveal the Father, to bring life to such as the woman at the well, to the man healed by the pool of Beth-zatha, the man born blind, to the woman taken in adultery. It meant the

preaching of the Gospel to a hostile nation, telling them the truth God had told him, witnessing to that truth, even to giving his life for the sheep. It included keeping those whom the Father had given him, dying for them and rising again—also for them.

Our tendency to think of signs as ‘supernatural’ events, and of other actions as ‘natural’ events is to put Christ’s works in different categories, and perhaps to evaluate the supernatural above the natural. All that he did—whatever words we may use to describe that all— were the works of God. As we have said, the works, the word of God and the signs must be viewed and under—stood together even though these three elements are not identical.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS IN COMPASSION

AN ESSAY IN UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE, NATURE AND SOURCE OF CHRIST’S SIGNS, WONDERS, HEALINGS AND WORKS

Christ and His Compassion

In Matthew 14:14 we are told that a great crowd had gathered to meet Jesus who was out on the sea in a boat. ‘As he went ashore he saw a great throng; and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick’. In Mark 1:41 we are told that Jesus was moved with compassion to—wards a leper who sought healing, and he healed him. We can safely assume then, that Jesus healed out of compassion. Even so, the occasions on which he is said to have had compassion was when he saw crowds ‘as sheep not having a shepherd’, so that his compassion went

beyond their states of illness to the lostness which he saw in their behaviour. They lacked leadership, guidance and salvation, and whilst he did heal many he saw their primary need was to have shepherds, i.e. those who would continually care for them. In Matthew 9:36–38 we read, ‘When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; pray there-fore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” ‘.

Another occasion in which his compassion is recorded is in Matthew 15:29–39 (cf. Mark 8:1–9). He had first healed (as in the parallel of Matthew 9:35–38), and then looking at the multitude had compassion upon them. In Matthew 15:32 Jesus said he had compassion ‘because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way’. This was the occasion of the feeding of the 4,000. In Mark 6:34 (cf. Matt. 9:36) we see that prior to the feeding of the 5,000, ‘he had com-compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things’. Following that, he fed them. We have the occasion-or occasions-recorded in Matthew 9:27–31 and 20:29–34 when Jesus had compassion on blind men and healed them. To this list of compassionate acts we can add Mark 9:14–27–the healing of the boy demoniac.

When we put these events together and examine them we see that Jesus had had compassion upon the sick, upon the crowds for their leaderless condition, and be-cause they were ill-taught. He had the simple compassion

for hungry people which moved him to feed them. These occasions teach us that Jesus was not interested in signs and wonders for their own sake, nor did he use them simply as a mode of ministry, i.e. he was a compassion-ate man, seeking to fulfil those needs which he saw to be genuine, and the doing of which really constituted mercy.

The Nature of Compassion

The Hebrew words *rachamim* and *rachum* have the same quality as the main Greek word *splanchnizoma*, namely ‘gut feeling’. It has the idea of sympathy with yearning for another, much the same as the English word ‘compassion’. In some modern English versions it is translated as ‘pity’, but pity can be condescending whereas compassion is an intimate fellow-feeling. In Matthew 18:21–35 the king had compassion on his servant who owed him a great debt, and his compassion led him to remit the debt. On the other hand the forgiven debtor would not forgive the trifling debt of his fellow-servant. Jesus had compassion upon the widow of Nain whose son had died. Compassion then is a practical thing. It comes very close to being the nature of mercy which is pity that is practical.

Jesus the Man of Feelings

When we view Jesus as an exceptional man we are likely to think that he handled all elements well, and without difficulty. This is because we fail to see the reality of his humanity. The prophet called him ‘a man of sorrows, familiar with grief’. This must mean he really understood the nature and experience of sorrow and grief.

If compassion is 'feeling with another', then he was certainly a compassionate man. He felt for the nobleman whose son was sick, the widow whose son he raised, the parents of the little girl whom he restored to life. He felt with the blind in their blindness, the lepers in their terrible disease and alienation from society. He sighed as he healed the deaf-mute, was gentle with the woman who was a sinner, had no condemnation but forgiveness for the woman taken in adultery, gave rich words of liberation and revelation to the woman at the well, had strong zeal for the Temple-'my Father's house'-loved the rich young ruler despite his refusal to give up his riches, wept over Jerusalem, trembled with indignation at the grave of Lazarus, came under deep pain in Gethsemane, suffered under Herod and Pontius Pilate, prayed for those who crucified him, cried out in utter loneliness when forsaken by God, bearing as he did the sin of the world, its ignominy and shame. All of these experiences tell us he was truly a man of feeling, and not some super-human being, able to suffer persecution unflinchingly, and remaining untouched by the sorrows, sadness, pain, griefs and anguish of the human race. He did not take kindly to human self-righteousness, hypocrisy and deceit, but spoke out against it. He was grieved by the hardness of human hearts, by the lack of faith in his hearers, by their refusal to hear and obey the truth, by the ingratitude of nine healed lepers, knowing all the time the deceitfulness of human hearts.

He espoused love, and knew what it was to be loved. Mary Magdalene had a deep love for him. Mary of Beth-any showed her love in the anointing of his body for his death. There was a disciple who could be called 'the

disciple whom Jesus loved'. He claimed he had loved them all in a way which was unique in and to their experience, and which demanded the responsive love of laying down of life for the brethren. He exalted the nature of love and sealed his revelation of it by his own death.

Works, Miracles, Signs and Wonders Done in Love

John scorned so-called love which was 'in thought and in word, but not in act'. Paul said that love ought not to be simulated, but genuine. He said that anything done without love had no value and no true merit. Jesus said that many would be shattered on the day of judgement to find that their so-called good works were of no value, and might even be called evil. Paul said that every work would have to be tried by fire, and doubtless such fire is holy love, testing out the value and reality of what we have done.

Our whole point in saying all we have said in this section is to show that doing signs and wonders without love, or helpful works without compassion is to use the doing of works, miracles, signs and wonders as a pattern of life or a methodology, especially if it is aimed at bringing praise to us, or is the means of gaining the goals we aspire to achieve.

For some the use of signs and wonders is a means to enlarging numbers in a church or congregation. Such signs and wonders become tools for advancing the programmes we espouse. We are not saying that it is not a good thing to expand the size of a congregation, but the real question is, 'Why are we doing such things?'. If we

assume that large numbers are good—whatever—then we may be wrong. If programmes are justifying us, proving us to the world, and giving us reputation, fame or for—tune, then our motivation is deficient, and may prove harmful and dangerous. We may think we are sheep when in fact we are goats. We may think we have accomplished much when in fact it is only hay, straw and stubble. We may believe we are alive when we are dead, may think we see when we are blind, may imagine we are hot when we are lukewarm, and may believe we are fruitful when we are barren.

The test of all our works is that they have been planned by God, energized by His power, motivated by His love, and done to the betterment of others, and are to the glory of the Father. Let us then have no talk of doing anything in the nature of works, miracles, signs and wonders un—less such acts are done with affection, with concern for others, and without glory to ourselves. Those who see us only as wonder—workers, doers of signs and miracles, may fear us, may be jealous of us, and may miss the sheer joy that such liberating and healing acts are intended to bring.

God and Man Doing Acts in Miracles, Works, Signs and Wonders

Man often desires to have the vast resources of power which he believes God possesses. When he—man—sees the problems, difficulties, evils and terrors which exist in the world, he wishes to solve, heal and correct them. He would claim, then, that he is one who has compassion. It has been said that sometimes man's so—called compassion

is really thinly disguised anger at God's seeming failure or reluctance to do anything about the problems which confront persons and the human race. Because the human heart is unreadable in all its motivations, anything—good or otherwise—might be motivating us when we desire to do what we believe is good. The drive to expiate our hid—den guilts, to justify ourselves, and to play God to other human beings is often mixed with some good urge that arises from the image of God, in which image we are made.

One thing is sure—God does not buy acceptance or favour from man by the good which He does. His 'good' may be that He judges the world gone evil, by the Flood which He sends. It may be fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah, or the destruction of the Amorites by the Israelites because the evil of the Amorites is at last ripe for such judgement. God's goodness and His severity are both alike—good. Thus we must know that God does good whether He judges or whether He sends healing. He kills and He makes alive.

Human reasoning is different. We must always do good to man. When he is ill we must heal, when he is burdened we must lighten his burden, when he is lost we must find him—and so on. In fact man has to suffer guilt or he would never seek and know grace. He must be burdened or he will never know liberty. He must be lost, or being found will not be an act of grace. His body is doomed to death because of sin, and so in that sense he must die, and carry with him the humiliation of inevitable corruption. If he does not he will not know the victory of resurrection.

So we could go on. The truth is that God is not bound

to do good to any man, and what good He does out of His grace will be true good and not merely seeming good. His signs and wonders—as we have seen—will mean judgement to evil forces, and liberation to His elect. What is so moving to us is that all that He does is out of grace, is constrained by His own love, and is done without condescension. His good brings the comfort of love to man, and gives him true dignity.

Thus we conclude that God's acts, whether in judgement and chastisement, or in liberating love through works, miracles, signs and wonders, are such as spring from His marvellous love. The great work of the atonement far surpasses the special deeds which seem to have some flavour of the supernatural. At best they will be subservient to the great work of grace, and at most, sheer reminders and assurances of His love.

This for us is the true pattern of the right and appropriate use of works, miracles, signs and wonders as well as services and other operations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

THE GOSPELS AND THE ACTS

The Johannine Prediction of Special Works

In John 14:12–14 Jesus promised, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works which I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it'. It can be seen then, (a) Jesus did all his works from the Father, (b) those who believe in him will go on doing the works which Jesus has been doing, and their works will be even greater, (c) the works cannot be done apart from the Son

who himself will do them in the Father, and (d) whatever his believing followers ask, the Christ will do—in them—by virtue of their prayer.

Again in Acts 1:1 the suggestion is that Jesus ‘began to do and teach’ when working in Palestine. This ‘beginning and doing’ Luke had described in the Gospel he had written. The Book of the Acts was written to show what he had gone on doing during the days of the apostles, and in fact goes on doing—even today. Acts 1:8 says that believers would have power when the Spirit came upon them—presumably at Pentecost. This was to be a continuing principle since the gift of the Spirit was given at Pentecost not only to the faithful 120 gathered in anticipation, but also to the 3,000 who believed. Doubtless this power related to the signs and wonders which the new church began to do (Acts 2:43; 3:1–16; 5:1–12; 14:3; 19:11–20; Rom. 15:18–19; cf. I Cor. 2:1–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:12; Gal. 3:1–5; 1:12; Heb. 2:1–5; 6:4).

The Markan Prediction of Special Works

In Mark 16:16–18 we have the command to preach, and the prediction of accompanying signs and wonders: ‘These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover’.

Undoubtedly the documentary authenticity of this section is questioned, but its inclusion seems to indicate the mind of the early church, and so ought to be acceptable

for us. Verse 20 confirms or describes what happened in the Book of the Acts: ‘And they went everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it’. We see again that the Lord worked with them in the proclamation and attested to this by his doing of signs and wonders.

Another fragment sometimes included at the end of Mark’s Gospel is, ‘Jesus himself sent out by means of them [the apostles], from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation’. Both these passages indicate that the purpose of signs and wonders was to attest the Gospel. It was the Gospel which was central and not the signs and wonders.

Expectation of Signs and Wonders to Come

We should then expect to see some action in the nature of signs and wonders or just ‘natural’ signs in the Book of Acts, and our expectations are not without fulfilment.

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE ACTS

In the Acts, signs and wonders are done primarily by the Lord. This is important to note because in the Old Testament, God did His mighty acts, and in the New Testament, Messiah—in the Gospels—did the acts, works, signs and wonders that the Father had called on him to do. This meant that in the Gospels the Father was doing these acts through the Son, the Messiah. In the

Book of Acts what Jesus had begun to do and teach, he then continued doing by means of the Spirit whom he poured out (Acts 2:33). Thus in 2:43 we read, 'and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles'. The doing of these signs and wonders would show that the era Jesus had introduced in his earthly ministry had not vanished. Indeed it was continuing.

Again in 3:1–16 we have the story of the healing of the man who had been lame from birth. When the people looked at Peter and John as though they had caused the miracle, Peter said, 'Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power [*dunamei*] or piety [*eusebeia*: godliness, awe, reverence] we had made him walk?'. He went on to show that it was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who had 'glorified his servant Jesus', i.e. attested by signs and wonders (cf. 2:22–23) so that 'his name, by faith in his name has made this man strong'. That is, God had worked through Jesus to heal the man, so that the apostles were simply instruments of God within that act.

Later, when speaking before the Jewish Sanhedrin or parliament, Peter reiterated the same principle that God, through Jesus, had healed the man—'by the name of Jesus Christ . . . by him this man is standing before you well' (4:10).

The next 'supernatural' event (5:1–11) was the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira. This event was wholly a judgement on two who were bringing hypocrisy—and thus corruption—into the new church. The effect was that 'great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things'. This purifying act was salutary, but did not halt the work, for in 5:12 we read,

'many signs and wonders were done among the people by [*de*] the hands of the apostles'. Again it was God working, assuring those in the church of His presence with them, and those outside that the church was being attested by Him. The effect of these two events was that 'more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women'.

In 5:19 *the Lord by an angel* did a wonder by releasing the apostles from prison. Again it was God who took the initiative and this with a view to further proclamation of the Gospel.

In 6:8 'Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people'. It is noteworthy that his deeds issued from 'grace and power'. At the same time he was a man of great wisdom so that those who disputed with him 'could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke'. To cap his speech given to the Sanhedrin he was able to look into heaven and see the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. This sign enraged those who heard him so that they killed him.

In 8:5–7 Philip is shown as doing signs in Samaria where he was proclaiming the Christ to them and 'preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ' (cf. 5, 12, 13). Simon Magus a magician 'seeing the signs and great miracles [which he, Philip] performed', was amazed.

The event of Paul's conversion is a sign and wonder in itself as a great light appeared and a voice from heaven was heard, but Ananias, being sent by God to Saul of Tarsus also gives a sign: (9:17), 'the Lord Jesus . . . has sent me that you may regain your sight'. This is what

Jesus calls ‘the things in which you have seen me’.

Another special event or sign takes place when the angel rescues Peter from prison (12:6–11). He later told them, ‘*the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting*’. This again was an act against Herod and an encouragement to the people of God. We note again the initiative that God takes, linked as it well may be with the prayers of the saints.

Two special signs took place as described in 9:32–43. The first was the healing of the paralysed Aeneas. Peter had said to him, ‘Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed’. The second was the raising of Dorcas. ‘Peter . . . knelt down and prayed . . . he said, “Tabitha, rise”’. Here we note that Jesus Christ healed Aeneas, and Peter was the means by which Tabitha (Dorcas) was raised from the dead.

In 12:22–23 we read the incident of the judgement of Herod, the one who had killed the apostle James with the sword. Because ‘he did not give God the glory’, he died of a terrible disease, for ‘the LORD smote him [Herod] . . . and he was eaten by worms and died’. By contrast we are told, ‘But the word of God grew and multiplied’. We cannot avoid seeing that the judgement of Herod was a sign which gave credence to the word of God, and empowered the hands of the apostles.

Another sign took place which was also a judgement, namely that of the blinding of Elymas the sorcerer at Paphos on the Island of Cyprus. Sergius Paulus had actually summoned Barnabas and Saul in order to hear the word of God and the sorcerer had sought to prevent this. That God was with the apostolic team is clear from

13:11–12: ‘behold, *the hand of the Lord is upon you*, and you shall be blind and unable to see the sun for a time’. The outcome of this happening was that ‘the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord’.

A most interesting case of the use of signs and wonders is in 14:1–3. After having ministered well at Antioch in Pisidia the apostles had moved on to Iconium, and they ‘so spoke that a great company believed, both of Jews and of Greeks’. This meant that no signs and wonders were required so that people would believe for they had believed the word *for itself*. However, the un-believing Jews now showed hostility at this word, and so they sought to poison the minds of their number against the apostolic team—and word. It was at this point that ‘the Lord bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by [dia, ‘through’] their hands’. It is clear that the apostles did not introduce signs and wonders as a counter measure, but that the Lord himself countered the opposition by doing signs and wonders through the hands of the apostles. Thus both apostles and the word were attested as genuine.

The next occasion of action was in the city of Lystra in the same district. Paul had discernment enough to see ‘that he had faith to be made well’, and healed him. The outcome was not the best, for the people thought of Barnabas and Saul as gods—Zeus and Hermes—and would have worshipped them. Even so the sign drew attention to them and so to the Gospel. The anger of the hostile Jews of Antioch and Iconium seems to have brought Paul near to death by stoning. Was it, then, a miracle that he rose up, entered the city, and went on to

further ministry? Certainly it was an unforgettable occasion (cf. II Cor. 11:25).

At the occasion often called 'the Council of Jerusalem' in the 15th chapter, Paul and Barnabas 'declared all that God had done with [meta, with] them'. In 15:12 we read that 'they related what signs and wonders God had done through [dia, through] them among the Gentiles'. This would be quite impressive evidence to the Jerusalem church and apostles that the ministry was authentic. James the elder of the church drew the Council to a conclusion that the ministry was correct.

In the next chapter (16) Paul, being annoyed by a girl with a spirit of divination, turned and exorcised the spirit from her and 'said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her" '. Certainly this event caused fierce opposition to the apostolic message as it was realized how powerful were these messengers of the Christian Gospel.

The next encounter is found in 17:16-34, where Paul preached 'Jesus and the resurrection', i.e. a sign and wonder which caused the discourse on Mars Hill. This was accompanied by the announcement of Christ as Lord and Judge since God no longer would pass over the times of man's (idolatrous) ignorance.

Acts 19:11-20 brings us into a most dynamic situation at Ephesus. The word was accepted for some time, but then another happening of polarization took place. The word and the apostles were opposed. As at Iconium, so now here signs and wonders took place. 'God did extra-ordinary miracles by [dia, through] the hands of Paul'. So effective were these that something like revival took place as people renounced their former occultic practices

and artefacts. The outcome of all of this was that 'the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily'.

Acts 20:7-12 describes the event of the fall of the sleeping Eutychus from the third story of a building. Whilst we cannot be sure that he was killed, the action of Paul in reviving him was certainly a great sign, for 'Paul . . . bent over him, and [embraced] him'. Doubt-less many other signs and wonders took place through Paul's hands, since the accounts of him in Acts by no means cover the whole of his ministry. The last two events concerning signs and wonders are found in (a) 28:3-6, where the viper's poison proves ineffective against God's servant Paul (cf. Mark 16:16), and (b) 28:7-10 which describes the healing of Publius' father: 'Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They presented many gifts to us'. This speaks of strong impressions of the apostolic band and their witness.

AN EVALUATION OF SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE ACTS

The material we have looked at needs a sensitive appraisal. Some points are quite apparent and can be stated simply. Others must wait until we discuss the whole matter of the proclamation of the word of God, and the place of signs and wonders in relation to it. The following observations seem to be valid:

- (i) As in the Old Testament, signs and wonders were

done through the hands of men such as Moses, yet it was the Lord Himself who did them. In Acts chapter 3 it appears that Peter heals the lame man out of his own gift or ability, but he insists it was done by God and through the power of Christ. This accords perfectly with John 14:12–14. In Acts chapter 14, when Paul heals the crippled man at Lystra, it again seems he has some innate power, but he claims that he is of like nature with the pagans. In Stephen's case, signs and wonders happened because he was 'full of grace and power'. That is, the signs and wonders were not events which the apostles could 'turn on' at will.

(ii) Whilst the signs and wonders attested to the word preached, and the preachers of the word, yet not on all occasions of preaching were signs and wonders present. A pattern seems to emerge that where there is opposition to the word—the word having been preached—God often attests to the validity of the opposed word by signs and wonders. Even so, it is not always the case that the opposed word is thus attested.

(iii) As in the Old Testament, signs and wonders can take the form of judgements. Thus Ananias and Sapphira die, Elymas goes blind for a time, and those who oppose the word are shown to be wrong. On the other hand the servants of God are vindicated, and the word of God shown to be right.

(iv) We note that whilst signs and wonders authenticate the word and preacher they do not make the Gospel triumphant over all adverse circumstances. When at first people flock to the word a polarization takes place which may leave the opponents of the Gospel in the majority. Sometimes in spite of signs and wonders—or perhaps

because of them—the proclaimers receive harm from their opponents. No matter; the witness has been made, and so hearers and watchers are responsible for the light they have received.

A COMPARISON OF SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE GOSPELS AND THE ACTS

This would be difficult to undertake, but it must be treated. In the Gospels, the Kingdom comes with Messiah himself. He is the King of the Kingdom by his baptism, anointing and the Father's declaration of him as the Son, all of which is in conformity with the prophecies made concerning Messiah. He is attested by the signs and wonders, works and deeds which he does, for they have their genesis in the Father. The Gospel he proclaims is 'the gospel of the kingdom' which is really Isaiah 52:7, 'Your God reigns'. Hence where Jesus goes the Kingdom goes or is. It liberates by the power appointed to the Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, Davidic King, person of Jesus.

Jesus had delegated his authority and power to the seventy and the twelve (Luke chs. 9 and 10), and they had told the recipients of healing that the Kingdom of God had come near them, though not upon them. The victory of the Cross had filled out the Gospel of the Kingdom to be the Gospel of salvation. The apostles had been given delegated authority (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:16–18; John 20:19–23) and had gone out under Christ. In them he did his works. In his people he still

does his works—'even to the consummation of [this] the age'.

Little—apart from Philip's ministry in Acts chapter 8—seems to reproduce what Jesus did in Palestine. Whilst the Kingdom of God is preached, the mode seems somewhat altered. This may be of necessity since (a) the Gospel of salvation, as such, was not intrinsically the Gospel of the Kingdom, and (b) the Gospel of salvation—though still the Gospel of the Kingdom—was based on the Lordship of Christ through resurrection (Acts 2:36; 10:36; cf. Rom. 10:9) and the defeat of death, guilt, and evil powers at the Cross. A close study of Acts 20:18–32 is rewarding since it uses various terms to describe the nature and content of the Gospel.

Whereas in the Gospels Christ's delegated authority and power overcome demons, sickness and the like, the 'word of the cross' carries an enormous power that makes the direct confrontation of 'Kingdom action' seem not so immediately significant. Doubtless signs and wonders are of immediate benefit to those whom they concern, and attest to preacher and word, but it is the word itself which is so potent. This we must later see.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

THE EPISTLES RELATING TO THE ACTS AND GOSPELS

There can be no doubt that the Epistles were written in the ethos of both the Gospels and the Acts. We would not expect to find it otherwise. The Epistles—for the most part—were written during the period of the Acts, and mostly prior to the writing of the Gospels.

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Although Hebrews is one of the later epistles, it refers to the Gospel–Acts events. This makes 2:1–4 relevant to our subject. Speaking of salvation the writer says, ‘It [the gospel] was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will’. This comes very close to what Paul says in Romans 15:18–19, a passage we will later study quite closely. He is certainly saying that the Gospel was preached with signs and wonders attesting–bearing witness to the word and the proclaimers. It is probably what is meant in 6:5 when he says that we have ‘tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers [*dunameis*] of the age to come’, i.e. ‘signs and wonders’.

In this passage it is not quite certain whether the signs and wonders attested to Christ’s proclamation of the word or to the proclamation by those who heard Christ. The signs and wonders and various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit would seem to point to those who followed Christ. The word ‘gifts’ can mean ‘distributions’ and may mean that God gave various distributions of the Spirit to different persons, and may not mean ‘gifts of the Spirit’ as we might understand them in I Corinthians chapter 12.

Even so, the conclusion we draw is that Christ proclaimed the word of the Gospel, his followers proclaimed the same word, and in both cases God bore witness to the

proclaimed gospel, as also He bore witness to the gossellers.

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER

I Peter 1:12–‘the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look’.

This passage simply says that the things prophesied prior to Christ have now been announced by those who preached the Gospel, through the Holy Spirit. If we bring the references in Hebrews and in Paul’s Letters together, then this should mean that the Holy Spirit assisted the apostles to preach the Gospel. It would surely mean that they communicated the word through the Spirit of truth, but also that his power was present in the action of signs and wonders. This is not stated so that we cannot dogmatically equate Peter’s statement with the statements of Hebrews and Paul’s Letters but it is fair enough to conclude this was the case.

I Peter 4:10–11 virtually calls the gifts (*charisma*) ‘the varied grace of God’. He speaks only of two specific gifts, namely ‘speaking’ (*laleo*) and ‘serving’ (*diakoneo*). When one speaks he must do so ‘as one who utters oracles of God’. This ministry appears to be within the context of the church. Even so it is that ‘God may be glorified through Jesus Christ’, and this would appear to mean that Christ is at the heart of the use of the gifts.

PAUL'S EPISTLES AND SIGNS AND WONDERS

I Corinthians 1:18–23

Paul's complaint against the Jews was that they seek after signs (I Cor. 1:22–24): 'For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God'. He is not criticizing signs as such, but the seeking after them (Mark 8:11f.; Matt. 16:1–4; John 2:18; cf. Num. 14:11, 22) rather than facing up to, and receiving the message of the Cross. God's power for salvation is not signs—which after all can only be confirmatory—nor wisdom—which after all can only proceed from man and so not be full or final—but the word of the Cross. The Cross is of course a scandal and seems to have nothing going for it as an instrument of salvation. Even so the Jew wanted God continually to be in history, setting out Messiah in wonderful terms. That God had done this (Acts 2:22–23) they did not believe, so their seeking for signs was really an arrogant matter, disbelieving the signs and wonders God had given, and demanding that things be as they thought they ought to be.

Neither signs nor wisdom can save, but Paul sees the Cross as God's wisdom, even if the Jew sees it as folly (Deut. 21:23; cf. Gal. 3:13) because it is a matter of curse and not of blessing. He sees it as God's saving power because of the many reasons he gives through his Epistles.

He does not see the word of the Cross (the Gospel)

and signs and wonders as being alternatives or in opposition to one another—far from it, but signs cannot save, of themselves.

Galatians 3:1–5

Here again—in this passage—the Cross and signs and wonders are linked: 'O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain—if it really is in vain. Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?'

Paul is pointing back to the revelation and experience of God's grace in the Cross to the Galatians, which was apparently attended with signs and wonders. It would seem that such signs and wonders—here 'miracles' (*dunameis*)—are still happening. It is certain such do not spring from law but are related to faith, i.e. 'hearing the word of God with faith'. Whether the ongoing nature of these *dunameis* is linked with proclamation and the expansion of the church, we do not know. We know only the constant need for hearing with faith. Paul appears to refer to the miracles mainly in order to counter the un-productive nature of the law—legalism into which the Judaizers are seeking to lead these Christians whose origins were of a Gentile nature.

If this is the case then at Galatia there is the warm

knowledge and experience that God is at work in their midst, and that not by law—as such! We notice ‘he who . . . works miracles among you’, for this means—as in the Old Testament, the Gospels and the Acts—that God takes the initiative, even though faith is required along with those signs.

II Corinthians 12:11–13

Paul had written on a number of occasions to the Corinthian church which he had founded. One of the charges brought against him by an enemy or enemies was that he was not a true apostle. Two charges were laid, (a) he had not been commissioned by Christ as had the other apostles, and (b) he would not let the church provide him with financial support, therefore he was not a genuine apostle since apostles saw that maintenance as their apostolic right. In this passage Paul defends himself by saying (a) that ‘the signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works’, and by asking (b) ‘For in what were you less favoured than the rest of the churches, except that I my–self did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!’.

We catch the fine irony in his last statement, but the claim that he did signs and wonders, and so was an apostle, was not an attempt to justify himself, since doing signs and wonders did not ipso facto make him an apostle. Philip and Stephen also did signs and wonders, and no doubt many others. It does, however, show us that apostles were specially attested by their doing of signs and wonders. It seems that some of the Corinthian church members were looking especially to signs and

wonders, and Paul ironically called their heroes ‘superlative apostles’ (II Cor. 11:5; 12:11), or as we would say today ‘super–apostles’! If that were the case, then those Corinthians had signs and wonders out of true perspective.

If we go back to 12:12 we see that the signs of an apostle were not only ‘signs and wonders and mighty works’, for the text says, ‘The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works’. This means that ‘the signs of an apostle’ were not ‘signs and wonders and mighty works’, but only that ‘the signs of an apostle’ had been done by Paul along with ‘signs and wonders and mighty works’. What then are the true ‘signs of an apostle’? What does it mean that such were done ‘with all patience’?

The ‘signs of an apostle’ were surely that the true apostle came proclaiming Christ, and the Gospel of Christ in the power of the Spirit, being a witness to him because he had seen the events of Christ. He came under the power of the Spirit (I Cor. 2:4–5; I Thess. 1:5; I Pet. 1:11), with the ‘apostolic doctrine’ committed to him as to no non–apostle, and as a result churches were born and nourished in the apostolic ethos, elders being appointed and the church committed to the word of His grace. One only has to read Galatians 1:11–2:10 to see that the true marks of an apostle were (a) that he directly had the apostolic truth, and his word must be seen as such, (b) that he had been personally commissioned by Christ, and so those hearing the apostolic word must obey it, and (c) that no one else had such word and authority directly from Christ but had to receive it from the apostles.

These signs of an apostle can be seen clearly in the first two chapters of I Thessalonians—amongst other Letters. Just as Paul had shown the true signs of an apostle ‘in all patience’ at Corinth because of the many troubles there, and his constant care for his converts in I Thessalonians chapters 1 and 2, he was one who brought the word of God in the power of the Spirit, and had then gone on to shepherd the new flock. All of these elements spoke of true apostleship.

A survey of the Book of Acts will show the apostolic signs. ‘Signs and wonders and mighty works’ were accompaniments to ‘the signs of the apostles’ but were only one factor in all those signs. Otherwise, as we have pointed out, Stephen, Philip and others must be included amongst the apostles, and in fact anyone who did signs and wonders would have been per se an apostle! On the other hand this argument would tend to limit signs and wonders to the apostles, so that none other could do them. Thus we are driven to see that the ‘signs of an apostle’ must be more than only signs and wonders.

If, then, ‘signs and wonders’ are the only signs of an apostle, then there is no differentiation of them from other workers of signs and wonders. If, however, we understand that the Corinthians thought—though wrongly— that, (a) an apostle had to be a super-figure, and (b) had to be supported by the church, then we can understand why Paul argued from another angle. His argument really was that they had come to Christ through him, and had been fostered in a fatherly way by him, so then did that not show he was an apostle, and did not the signs and wonders he had done simply and definitively confirm this? ‘Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? . . . Are you

not my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord’ (I Cor. 9:1–2).

We can now further consider our question regarding the meaning of ‘in all patience’. It surely means that the true signs—i.e. works and deeds—of an apostle demanded steady endurance in the midst of trials, e.g. (I Thess. 1:5–6): ‘You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord’. It must be seen that ‘signs and wonders and mighty works’ were done in the same spirit of patience, and also that these signs and wonders and mighty works were not initiated by the apostles themselves (cf. Acts 3:12; 14:3).

If what we have argued above is true then this comports clearly with Romans 15:18–19: ‘by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit’. If only ‘signs and wonders’ attest to true apostleship, then ‘word and deed’ are not required.

Romans 15:17–19

‘In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ’.

The essence of this passage is ‘I have worked hard, yet not I but *Christ himself has worked through me* to produce obedience to himself in the Gentiles. He has done

this by word and deed, in the midst of signs and wonders by the power of the Spirit, so that in full range of my endeavours I have thus preached fully the Gospel of Christ.’

If we are permitted—partly at least—to interpret this passage in the light of II Corinthians 12:11–12, then we may understand ‘by word and deed’ (*logo kai ergo*) to equal ‘the signs of a true apostle’, ‘by the power of signs and wonders’ to equal ‘signs and wonders and mighty works’, and ‘by the power of the Holy Spirit’ to cover both ‘the signs of a true apostle’ and ‘signs and wonders and mighty works’. This will mean—in both cases—that ‘signs and wonders’ are an accompaniment to the preaching of the Gospel, but are not, necessarily, ingredients of the Gospel itself, or even indispensably essential to it.

In a later section we will take up the matter of the apostolic proclamation of the word, but ‘word and deed’ must first be seen as apostolic, and extremely important. The phrase ‘word and deed’ may mean on the simplest level ‘speech and action’, but then what are speech and action if not the utterance of the word which is accompanied by action, and in turn brings forth more deeds? At the strongest level ‘word and deed’ mean the preaching of the Gospel itself requiring all ‘the signs of an apostle’ (II Cor. 12:11–12). In other words all of Paul’s life of proclamation is caught up in ‘word and deed’, including his burning desire to preach the Gospel because it has laid hold of him, and all the suffering it has entailed, such as we find in II Corinthians 4:7–12, 6:3–10 and 11:22–29. ‘Word and deed’ are then the whole of Paul’s ministry, which—we might say—are the proclamation and works he does—though not apart from Christ—whilst

‘the power of signs and wonders’ and ‘the power of the Holy Spirit’ are what *Christ* (or the Father) effects to attest his servant and to make his endeavours effective. If we view ‘word and deed’ as merely ‘talk and action’ we may be taking from their great importance. In II Corinthians 10:11—though in a lesser vein—Paul says what he writes in a letter when absent will be no less dynamic than when he is (i.e. will be) present. His deeds are as good as his words, his words as good as his deeds (cf. II Thess. 2:17). If such ‘word and deed’ were absent then ‘signs and wonders’ would have nothing to which they could attest.

As for ‘signs and wonders’, well we know what they mean from our previous studies. They are God (Christ) working in the midst as a present power, showing by events beyond the natural that He is not only not absent but is so present that the work and word of His apostle is powerfully attested. Those who see the signs must believe the word, submit to it, obey it, and come into obedience to Christ. Doubtless, then, ‘by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit’ is a statement that corresponds to ‘in demonstration of the Spirit and of power’ (I Cor. 2:4), and ‘our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction’ (I Thess. 1:5).

CHAPTER NINE

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

THE BAD AND FALSE SIGNS

In this book the only actions nominated as signs are those which are false and evil. In Matthew 24:24 (cf. Mark 13:22) Christ foretold, 'For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect'. In passing it is useful to note that 'great signs and wonders' as arising from Christ were not to lead astray but to lead in the way of God.

In Revelation 13:13–18 the second beast, which in Revelation 19:20 is identified with the false prophet, 'works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven [cf. Rev. 20:9] to earth in the sight of men; and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of

the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth', so that the inhabitants make an image of the beast and receive its mark, i.e. 666. Revelation 19:20 confirms this happening: 'And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image'.

Again, in Revelation 16:13–14 we read, 'And I saw, issuing from the mouth of the dragon and from the mouth of the beast and from the mouth of the false prophet, three foul spirits like frogs; for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty'. Revelation 16:16 adds, 'And they assembled them at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon'.

In Revelation 12:1–2 there is the portent or sign of the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on whose head there is a crown of twelve stars. In the same context there is another sign or portent—that of the red dragon who takes with him a third of the stars and sets out to oppose the woman who brings forth the Christ from her womb. We might say that these two signs oppose each other, which is a rare occurrence in Scripture. For the moment we will not seek to interpret these two signs and their significance.

THE GOOD AND THE TRUE SIGNS

Apart from the portent of the woman clothed with the sun, there is no literal mention of good signs as such. It

may be said that the two witnesses in Revelation chapter 11 do signs, and this would appear to be so. Fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If in 13:13 the second beast or false prophet causes fire to come down from heaven and that is called a sign, then fire pouring out of the mouth of the witnesses may also be called a sign. Certainly the signs and wonders which Elijah wrought such as the 'shutting up of the sky' (creating drought), and the signs and wonders as God had wrought in Egypt, namely 'power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire' (11:6) must be treated as signs and wonders.

We have said above that there is no literal mention of good signs in the Book of the Revelation, but in fact the signs of the two witnesses are good, since they defeat evil, and perhaps for a time aid the elect of God (cf. 15:2–4). Even so, the value of these signs such as enforced drought and plagues, lead us to the conclusion that all the judgements recorded in relation to the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath must be signs and wonders. They are of course wonders, but they are also signs, for in Exodus we saw that signs and wonders aid the people of God but come against those who oppose God and His people. Thus we may arrive at the conclusion that much—indeed most—of the Book of the Revelation is the description of signs and wonders. This conclusion is not simply in the interests of research into the number of signs and wonders, but rather into their significance, for at this point we may conclude that—as in Egypt—one aspect of signs and wonders is their judgemental action.

CHAPTER TEN

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE WHOLE MATTER OF SIGNS AND WONDERS

THE LIVING GOD

There are at least two elements understood in the Scripture by the term 'the living God'. The first one is that God is the giver of life in creation, in providence—the sustaining of life—and in redemption. He is 'the fountain of living waters' (Jer. 2:13; 17:13; Ps. 36:9; 87:7; John 6:35; 7:37; Rev. 7:17; 22:17). The second one is 'the God who acts'. That is, God is not absent from His creation but present to it in relating to every atom and molecule of it. He acts within it and for it continually. This is not only in regard to its 'fixed order' (Ps. 148:6; Jer. 31:35–36), but in regard to His plan for it, i.e. 'according to the counsel of his will'. Ephesians 1:3–14 shows various elements of this will, as also Ephesians

3:1–11, amongst other Scriptures.

This living, active nature of God is shown in His covenants particularly with Abraham, Israel, David and in that covenant called 'the new covenant'. Some scholars speak of God 'irrupting into' or 'breaking into' the normal order of creation. Since it is God's creation, and He is present continually to it, it would be 'normal' for Him to operate within it even though that operation may be seen as 'out of the normal', or 'supernatural'.

Passages which speak of God being 'the living God' are many and are all to do with something special in His action, and generally are of a revelational nature. Examples are: Joshua and the crossing of Jordan (Josh. 3:10ff.); David and Goliath (I Sam. 17:26ff.); Daniel and the lion's den (Dan. 6:20ff.); Peter and his confession (Matt. 16:16f.); the high priest and his accusation (Matt. 26:63); falling into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:30–31).

In the light of the fact of the living God, signs and wonders, then, are understandable, normal and necessary. How else can God disclose Himself at a point of crisis? Is He bound to reject what we call 'the miraculous' so that we may live in an undisturbed world? In this case He would neither aid and bless on the one hand or judge and punish on the other.

AN INTERPRETATION OF SIGNS AND WONDERS

Signs and wonders are the living God doing those actions for and through His people which further His plans for

His elect people and His creation.

(i) What we may call His ordinary signs—signs with—out (so—called) supernatural elements—are generally prophetic and confirmatory when He is guiding a person or persons in a certain form of action. Such may be warning or confirmatory of His will.

(ii) What we generally call 'signs', 'wonders' and 'mighty works'—often termed 'supernatural'—are those acts God does (a) to do good for His character and His people, and (b) to testify against, warn, judge and punish evil—doers and the powers of darkness. These aid and hasten the fulfilment of that action and process of God's plan which we call 'salvation history'.

(iii) These actions of signs and wonders are done by God, and are not initiated by man, although often done through man. Human beings from time to time may ask for signs and wonders and God may grant them to be done in answer to prayer.

(iv) Signs and wonders are powerful and of the good order of things. This is testified to by the effects and results of the actions of God, and also by the fact that the forces of evil themselves wish to, and seek to, do signs and wonders (a) to testify to themselves as powerful and significant within the creation, and (b) to deceive man—kind as they make themselves out to be 'good' and to be thought of as holding sovereign power within the creation.

(v) Signs and wonders attest to God and His servants. Moses and Elijah were attested, not only to those opposed to God outside of covenant, but to those also within covenant who questioned them. In the proclamation of the Gospel by Christ and his followers, signs and wonders

attested both to Christ and his followers, and not only to themselves but to the word of God which they spoke– and speak!

(vi) Signs and wonders actually accomplish certain things, since they are actions of God. In the case of miracles such as exorcisms and healings, they liberate and heal. At the same time they diminish–by these acts–the power, control and effectiveness of evil. They extend the life of liberty and joy of those affected by the signs and wonders for good. They effect judgements and even punishments where required and so reveal the holiness of God, His anger against evil, and are His ways of dealing with it. Thus they are revelations to good and evil persons alike of the true nature of God—a revelation which might not come through in precisely the same way through the ‘fixed order’ of things.

(vii) Signs and wonders are not the word of God. They may be part of that word when, for example, healing is commanded, exorcism takes place by command, and people respond to the command of the Gospel and are saved. We may well call this ‘the enacted word’. Even so the word of God is of itself dynamic, effecting what it (He) says, even if uttered by His servants. The power to respond to this word does not lie in man, but in the word itself. Not to respond means man is rejecting the word. The attestation to that word—as also its messenger—by signs and wonders makes man culpable when he does not respond.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GOD'S GIFTS, AND HIS SIGNS AND WONDERS**THE NATURE OF THE GIFTS**

Does the use of the gifts (charismata) equal the doing of signs and wonders? Some Bible scholars would think so. In fact it seems obvious that since some of the signs and wonders relate to healings, miracles and exorcisms, and since Christians who possess the gifts of healing and miracles can do these things, they can thus do signs and wonders.

At first reading this seems irrefutable, but we need to examine the matter more closely. Most would agree that

the use of certain of the gifts does not constitute signs and wonders. For example, the use of 'helps' or 'organizing' would not stand out as a sign or wonder to those outside the realm of faith, so that the exercise of all gifts would not be the full operation of signs and wonders. Paul appears to say that the corporate speaking of tongues by the church would convince outsiders that the believers must be mad! Prophecy nevertheless would be a powerful sign (I Cor. 14:20–25).

Signs and wonders are primarily attestation by God Himself to His word, His plan and His people. Actions –the use of gifts–called signs and wonders which do not fit into this category would not be signs and wonders. They would simply be gifts exercised. Like–wise where signs and wonders are intended to be judgements and where the use of gifts does not fit this category, then they are simply the use of gifts and are not signs and wonders.

The Primary Purpose of the Use of Gifts

Paul's exposition of the gifts in I Corinthians 12:1–13 has a central theme, namely the unity of the church, of God's people. In fact he is not discussing gifts only but two other elements, i.e. 'varieties of service' and 'varieties of working'. These link with 'varieties of gifts'. The presence, function and working of the three things constitute the unity of the church–in fact a unity in diversity. It is an interesting side observation to note that 'varieties of service' and 'varieties of working

[operations]' are rarely discussed, perhaps because they do not seem so interesting and exciting! In any case the three elements work together functionally and the neglect of one will bring imbalance in the working of the others.

The three elements are there 'to profit withal', i.e. 'for the common good'. In this textual context, then, it seems the gifts are primarily for the inner working of the church –the body of Christ. We know that initially the gifts of apostle and evangelist–and possibly prophet–are given to open up new ground and bring churches into being. Pastor and teacher (or pastor–teacher) along with the prophets are primarily for the inner life of the church. These gifts as enunciated in Ephesians 4:11–16 are primarily for 'the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ'. Other gifts in I Corinthians 14:26–33 such as those of revelation, tongues, tongues–interpretation and prophetic utterance are used for internal worship of the church, and must be seen in that context. We note that just as there is order in the church for various aspects of worship so there must be order for the use of the gifts– they are not to be utilized willy–nilly.

As such, then, the gifts would be mainly used in the church. Only two of the nominated gifts in I Corinthians 12:28–30–apart from apostle and prophet–with, per–haps, evangelist–are gifts to be used in the proclamatory work of the church. These are 'workers of miracles' and 'healers'. The question then arises, 'Do these apostles, prophets and evangelists–along with miracle workers and healers–involve themselves in signs and wonders?'.

Gifts, and the Doing of Signs and Wonders

We must keep in mind that doing signs and wonders is not a given ministry as such. In the Acts there are occasions when the apostolic preaching is not attended with signs and wonders. This may mean that there is a discernible pattern as to when signs and wonders are used. It would seem they are mainly used when and where there is opposition when the word is proclaimed (Acts 4:23–34; 13:6–12; 14:1–6; 19:8–20; cf. 28:3–6). Even so, we must note that there were occasions of opposition when the doing of signs and wonders was not recorded.

In Acts 9:32–42 we have two accounts of healing which can be said to be within the body—the church—yet which had great impact outside the church. In Acts 5 with the judgements of Ananias and Sapphira there was again an internal ‘sign and wonder’ but it effected a great impact outside the church. On the basis of these things we should be cautious about confining the gifts (*charismata*) to the church, just as also we should be cautious as to the extent of their use outside the church.

The conclusion that I believe we are justified in drawing is this: signs and wonders are God’s prerogative, and not that of the church or its members. In other words there is no such exercise as planned signs and wonders. Whilst gifts may be used in remarkable ways within the church, they are not to be thought of as being used by members of the church to create signs and wonders, except where God, Christ and the Spirit direct. The fact that the gift of miracles is included among the *charismata* (I Cor. 12:28) shows us that the use of some

of the gifts may have to do with signs and wonders¹. Even so, we must ask whether miracles were—so to speak—‘done to order’, or whether they were confined to the rare occasions of attesting to the word or the proclaimers of the word. On the whole—it would appear—signs and wonders are not to be confined to the range of the gifts, but are actions of various kinds which God chooses to do to remind His world that He is working in it according to His sovereign choice and intention.

Signs and Wonders and the Proclamation

If we conclude that gifts are not things in themselves, and if we keep in mind also ‘the services’ and ‘the workings’ which no doubt are aided by the gifts and aid the gifts for the unity of the body, then we will not make the mistake of using gifts—or for that matter signs and

¹ NOTE: 1n I Corinthians 12:28-31 Paul is not describing the use of gifts as such. Some see the gifts of apostles, prophets and teachers of verse 28 (cf Eph. 4:11, where 'evangelist' and 'pastor' are added, and where the word 'gifts' /s *domata* and not *charismata*) as ministry gifts, or gifts of ministry given to the church, whereas other gifts are manifestations of the Spirit, and-it would seem-connected with the 'varieties of service', and the 'varieties of working' of verses 4 to 6. The placing of miracles after 'apostles, prophets and teachers' may link the doing of miracles with these ministries, in which case their action could be part of the signs and wonders, but we cannot be dogmatic about this. What does seem clear is that the order in which Paul states the gifts is in a hierarchical one of function and value, and probably of authority. There is certainly ground here for further research. We must certainly inquire whether many of the *charismata* could be classed as having the nature of signs and wonders. For the most part signs and wonders are described as being done by those who are apostles and evangelists, i.e. those who come under the term *domata*, and not *charismata* Since in the Old Testament prophets did signs and wonders, it is probable they would do so in the church.

wonders—to draw attention to the church, to persons, or even to the word of God. Since gifts are ‘manifestations of the Spirit’ then they will be dependent upon the true working of the Spirit. Since God initiates and executes signs and wonders then the operations of these will be dependent upon Him. It is God who attests to His word and the proclaimers of it. Certainly the use of gifts, and even of signs and wonders is not an attention–drawing exercise, but an attestation operation deriving from God Himself.

It is here we need to look at Hebrews 2:1–4 again.

We saw in this passage that God attested to the word preached by those who had heard the Lord, i.e. the apostles. It is then said—beyond this primary attestation – ‘while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will’. We have seen that ‘gifts of the Spirit’ is technically ‘distributions of the Spirit’ and does not necessarily mean ‘gifts’. On the one hand it could mean ‘something which the Spirit distributed’, and on the other ‘distributions—by God—of the Spirit him–self’. It could even refer back to the signs and wonders themselves. Granted, however, that the signs and the wonders came first, and then gifts, this could mean ‘signs and wonders’ outside the church to confirm the word, followed by gifts within the church to seal that word for the members. In fact we have so wide a range that it is unadvisable to rely upon this passage for building a principle of signs and gifts.

In Hebrews 6:4–6 we have a vexed passage for discussion. It can mean on the one hand that the readers have been enlightened, have received the Holy Spirit,

have repented, have experienced the goodness of the word of God and have known the powers of the ‘age to come’, which we understand to mean that they have seen attesting and confirming signs and wonders. It can mean on the other hand that the readers never did come to a conclusive experience, but only teetered on the edge of it, as ‘tasted’ seems to indicate. They are now contemplating withdrawal from even that tentative position. Whatever the meaning one thing remains clear—they had been impressed and affected deeply by the Holy Spirit who had brought before them ‘the powers of the age to come’, which we understand to mean ‘signs and wonders’, for these are characteristic of the ‘age to come’.

In I Peter 4:11 we have two things, (a) the one speaking who utters the oracles (truths) of God as though it were God speaking immediately through him, and (b) the one who renders service by the strength supplied. This passage shows us that the one who is prompting and aiding this is Jesus Christ, and that it is all for God’s glory so that we see—once again—that the initiative is not taken by speaker or server.

CHAPTER TWELVE

GOOD WORKS, GOD'S GIFTS, AND HIS SIGNS AND WONDERS

THE MATTER OF WORKS AND GOOD WORKS

Works that Are Not Good

It is clear in the Scriptures, and especially in the New Testament, that works which human beings do cannot justify a person. These are called 'dead works' (Heb. 6:1; 9:14) when they are sin, and they need to be repented of. In Isaiah 64:6 the prophet cried, 'all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment'. Paul insisted, 'a man is not justified by works of the law' (Gal. 2:16; cf. Ps. 143:2), saying in another place that salvation is 'not because of works, lest any man should boast' (Eph. 2:9). In II Timothy 1:9 he speaks of God saving us by a holy calling,

'not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus from times eternal'. In Titus 3:5 he repeats the same idea, 'he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit'.

Works That Are Good

In this passage just read we can see that on the one hand our works do not avail anything for us, but that God's grace has transcended our efforts and has re-deemed us. Even so, this does not mean that works are of no use. The classic utterance regarding this is Ephesians 2:8-10: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them'. We see then that we were created (in fact, recreated) in Christ Jesus in order to do works, and those works God had long ago prepared for us to do.

It is interesting to read the seven letters in the Book of the Revelation—chapters 2 and 3—for in five of the letters, Jesus says, 'I know your works'. In the other two letters he infers the same. To him works are significant. Works done without love (2:4) are of no value (cf. I Cor. 13:1-3). In 2:19 he tells a church, 'your latter works exceed the first'. In 2:23 he states a principle: 'I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve'. He had said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:16), 'Let your light so shine before

men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven'. Paul said the purpose of the atonement was related to the matter of good works – '[He] gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds'.

**What, Then, Are the Works
Which Are Good?**

It has been thought that good works constitute the use of gifts, and in addition, signs and wonders. Well, of course, the use of the gifts must be included, but true works extend far beyond the use of gifts, and are not limited to signs and wonders. Indeed they cover all that is good which a person does under the guidance and aid of the Father, Christ and the Holy Spirit. We nominate some of them.

All Jesus' actions were works which he did for the Father. The Father did His works in and through the Son. He—the Father—works in us when we work with fear and trembling. He who has begun a good work in us will complete it right up until the day of Jesus Christ. Even so, we personally are to 'lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work', our work is to be 'a work of faith and labour of love', we are to obey our leaders and 'esteem them very highly in love because of their work', we are 'to let patience have her perfect work', we should be established well 'in every good work and word', we should be 'complete, equipped for every good work'.

Mary did a good work when she anointed Jesus with

the ointment. Dorcas was full of good works. Jesus said, 'we must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day', and so included us in his works. His statement that we would do even greater works than he did because he was to go to the Father, alerts us to the fact that every kind of work—not just healings, miracles, and signs and wonders or even the preaching of the Kingdom—is of great importance. Worship and praise, prayer and inter-cession, the feeding of the poor, visiting the fatherless and widows, weeping with the sorrowful and rejoicing with the joyful—there is no limit to the kind of works we can do. In the Revelation, God's people are hounded by Satan, the red dragon, by his beast, the false prophet, and are destroyed by the unholy harlot, Babylon. Twice there is a call for the endurance of the saints (13:10; 14:12), but the promise to the martyrs is 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord . . . that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them'.

So, then, in every way and in all situations, we must do works, not limiting those to one or another kind of deed, but pressing on in all, anticipating the great Day when He shall say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!'. In-deed the Son shall say, 'Come, beloved of my Father, enter the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'.

Surely in that Day we shall see the point and purpose to a life of works. We work not in order to be saved, but because we have been saved. We shall receive back the things done in the body whether good or bad. There will be losses and rewards. The work of all believers 'will be made manifest', and the works of some will be 'burned up'

and that one suffer great loss, 'but he himself will be saved, but only as through fire'.

These things lead us from indolence to endeavour, from self-indulgence to disciplined action and a love for good works, and a constraint to do them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**BAD AND FALSE WORKS,
WITH GIFTS, SIGNS
AND WONDERS**

THE MATTER OF EVIL WORKS

**Satan's Evil Counterpart
to the True Good**

All things that are true and of God, Satan and the powers of darkness not only seek to emulate, but to outclass. Satan really thinks he can persuade the world that he is God and as such is to be worshipped (II Thess. 2:3-4). He does not so much seek to devise a *counterfeit*

of God's true things—i.e. that which is ontological—but seeks to devise a counterpart to what is ontological. An example of this is found in Revelation 13. Here we find, if we seek closely enough, a counterpart unontological (or ante-ontological) trinity—the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. God is King and has His Kingdom, so Satan seeks to give himself out as king, and he has a kingdom of sorts (Luke 11:17–18). God is Father and Satan is also a father of sorts (John 8:44; I John 3:10). God is the primary object of worship, and Satan seeks even Jesus to worship him (Satan) (Matt. 4:7–10; cf.

II Thess. 2:3–4). God has angels, and Satan has his (Rev. 12:4, 9). So we could go on, but what we need to comment here is:

**Satan's Nature and Method of Defeating
the Goodness of God**

There is nothing original about Satan and his work. He creates nothing, being—as he is—a creature.

He is imitative and an expert in mimicry, but nothing that he does can be true. He has been called 'God's ape'.

He is unontological, anti-ontological and ante-ontological. We mean that as a liar he cannot know the truth, so that he is not of the truth—unontological. He is against the truth, opposing it powerfully—anti-ontological. He seeks to supplant what is true by what is untrue but give the impression that the untrue is true—ante-ontological. He uses deceit, trickery, disguise, seduction and threat to build his kingdom, and to defeat God and His people.

All of this being the case, we would expect to see great

works of Satan, great gifts and great signs and wonders since these are the methods by which God works. We see the following:

**The Nature of the Ambitious
World-System**

Satan seeks to deceive the whole world (Rev. 12:9), i.e. the world of nations—that world which God has created for His own purposes and which rightfully belongs to Him. Satan's system is called 'this present evil world [age: aeon or *kosmos*]'. He is called 'the prince of this world' or 'the god of this world' (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; II Cor. 4:4) and cruelly possesses angelic and human creatures—dupes of his insatiable ambition to topple God. He blinds men's eyes to the Gospel (II Cor. 4:4) lest he lose his slaves. The world has its own wisdom or 'spirit' which in fact is false (I Cor. 1:20; 3:19;

I Cor. 2:12) but which is greatly admired (cf. Rev. 13:4; 17:8; 18:9–19). The world hates Christ (John 7:7) and his people (John 15:18ff.; 17:14) because of their continual threat—in holiness—as they confront the world in its evil. The world and its fashions are passing and ephemeral (I Cor. 7:31; I John 2:15–17) because there is nothing essentially true in it. The world has harsh sorrow and not genuine—i.e. ontological—joy (II Cor. 7:10). It has its ruling and despotic 'elemental spirits' (Gal. 4:3; Col. 2:20f.) and is in fact a brilliant and intelligent system in all its evil plans and operations. It has its ruling powers, its principdoms, and its weapons of warfare

(I Cor. 2:8; Rom. 8:38; Col. 2:20; Gal. 4:3, 8; Eph. 6:12).

THE POWER PLOY OF EVIL BY THE USE OF BRILLIANT DECEIT

The Self-Deceit of All Evil

With all this system-structured as it is by the brilliance of its god, its celestial and human creatures-Satan has the intelligence and personnel to put his plans into action. Sin aids him because it is a deceiver and killer (Rom. 7:11). Human lusts are also deceptive (Eph. 4:22). Man himself being deceived is also a deceiver (II Tim. 3:13). The great drive and thrust of all evil is the desire for autonomy. Satan himself has been deluded by it (cf. Isa. 14:13-14; Ezek. 28:11-17; II Thess. 2:3-4), the woman was seduced by the idea, and the man greatly coveted this goal, and so rebelled against God. Constantly man-even redeemed man-can be freshly grip-ped by the dream of autonomy, i.e. one being an inde-pendent god in one's own right (cf. II Cor. 11:1-3).

THE EVIL USE OF GIFTS, SIGNS AND WONDERS BY SATAN

Because he thinks he can be something, Satan is com-pulsive in his desire to rule, to be thought to be a true god, and to be worshipped-even beyond God Himself. Man is infected by the same evil and seeks to substantiate himself in the same way. What powers does the world possess in order to reach this goal?

In Luke 11:21-22 there is more than a hint that Satan possesses certain riches which must initially have been

stolen (cf. John 10:10a) and which will be restored to man (Isa. 53:12). Ephesians 4:8-10 seems to indicate that Christ-in his battle with evil at the time of the Cross- won back what had been lost and so 'gave gifts to men'. This could mean that Satan has been working all the time with 'stolen goods'.

Be that as it may, we know that we are warned against the deceit of evil. In Matthew 24:24 Jesus gives such a warning, 'For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect'. John in his first Letter warns against the deception of many such antichrists (2:18-27; 4:1-6). In II Thessalonians 2:1-12 Paul expounds the nature of the coming 'son of perdition', i.e. 'the lawless one'. He says, 'The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pre-tended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish'.

These Scriptures warn us to be on the alert against that which appears to be good-signs and wonders. It is obvious that if God shows His presence in the affairs of men by 'signs and wonders and mighty works', then Satan must also show himself in a similar way in order that he might deceive man into thinking he is as powerful as God. The Matthew 24:24 prediction is seen being fulfilled in Revelation 13:11-17 where the second beast (or false prophet) deceives for 'It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth'. Again, in Revelation 16:13-16, as we saw before, there are three foul spirits who are demonic, 'performing

signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty’.

We see, then, that the doing of signs and wonders is not just a vagrant exuberance on the part of evil powers but something of a most deadly nature, designed to bring mankind against God. We must understand the implacable hatred of evil of the world-system in the light of the story of Psalm 2.

THE EVIL USE OF GIFTS, SIGNS AND WONDERS BY MAN

Man, too, is in this evil use of gifts. In Matthew 7:21–23 Jesus said, ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me you evil-doers” ‘.

This is a most important passage for full understanding of the theme of our book. Jesus has been talking about trees and their fruit. One cannot gather grapes from a thorn bush, nor figs from thistle plants. A sound tree brings forth good fruit, but an unsound one brings forth bad fruit. We note that some listening to Jesus *thought* they were gathering grapes and/or figs, *thought* they were bringing forth good fruit, but they were deluded.

In the Old Testament, there are numerous times when

God’s people are warned against using false prophets and forms of magic and the occult in order to have divination lead them into the action of life. The same section (Deut. 18:9–22) urges them to listen to God’s word and not to the false and delusive words of others. Many other passages warn against false prophecy and Jeremiah 23:23–40 is a classic warning against ‘the prophets who steal my words’.

Doubtless many of Jesus’ listeners thought that even by participating in hearing, they somehow were authenticated as believers. Doubtless, also, those in the Old Testament who had prophesied thought their prophecies were genuine. The story of Aaron and Miriam in Numbers 12:1–16 warns against pride in prophecy. The even more terrible story of the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16 and the consequent holocaust in which two hundred and fifty men offering incense were consumed, tells us that although these men thought their offering was authentic, it was—in reality—evil and false. Down through the centuries of time how many have offered up ‘strange fire’ of one kind or another?

That those linked with magic and other forms of the occult can do strange and unusual things is not denied. Even if the larger proportion of their accomplishments be ‘lying and pretended’, yet some of it will be actual accomplishment. It is clear that the beast was ‘allowed’ to do certain things, and doubtless in turn Satan gives these powers to use God’s original gifts in an unholy and evil way. In II Thessalonians 2:9 Satan’s work is called ‘pretended signs and wonders’. ‘Pre-tended’ may mean that the signs and wonders are not real, or it may mean that they pretend to give a message such

as came from Jesus' signs. Miracles that happen without being signs are simply wonders without any purpose other than to draw attention to the doers. They do not authenticate the person, but simply show what powers he has, or claims to have. We see in John 2:23–25 and 4:48 that seeking miracles for their own sake is a wrong pursuit.

On a lesser scale of importance, and yet not unimportant is the passage in Luke 10 when the seventy disciples of Christ return from proclaiming the Gospel in towns and villages. They say, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!'. Jesus informed them that they had been given great authority over the powers of evil and his advisory word was, 'Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven'. There was the possibility of pride on their part, and the arrogant use of delegated power. In the same breath we are reminded of the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13–16, and of Simon Magus in Acts 8:18–24, for on both occasions the people involved were seeking for power to do 'great things'. On both occasions there were dire warnings in this matter.

Again—though perhaps not quite in the same vein—are Paul's statements in I Corinthians 13:1–3. Paul states that the use of the gifts without love is fruitless. Nothing is accomplished, and the person using the gifts is nothing. Doubtless one can remove mountains by faith, but then to what point? Likewise in I Corinthians 3:10–15 is another warning. It is virtually against fleshly operations in the name of Christ. Paul points out that all our work will be tried 'as by fire', i.e. what is destructible will be destroyed.

Whilst many of us will be saved—'as by fire'—yet nothing of our work will remain. Is this what is suggested by Paul in I Corinthians 9:24–27 where he speaks of the possibility of being 'disqualified', or being put on a shelf as useless? Serving God is a serious thing, and in such serving there is no place for self-display and self-advancement.

All of these things warn us that the use of gifts, and even involvement in signs and wonders may mean nothing, and—in the ultimate—accomplish nothing. This is a solemn thought, especially when Paul suggests we can even be 'pedlars of God's word' (II Cor. 2:17).

Other Elements Relating to Doing Good in the Name of God

The use of gifts needs to be done 'for edification' and 'for peace' (cf. I Cor. 14:20–33). Perhaps one of the attractions of the gifts is that they are not of the usual order of things. They are of course, normal, and yet since they seem to have elements of 'the supernatural', they attract more attention than 'services' and 'workings'. Clear instructions are given in this Corinthian passage, especially in regard to the use of tongues, of interpretation, and of prophecy. Although the elders are not mentioned we may safely assume that the elders would watch over the use of gifts.

In relation to this we need to give attention to the problems which beset us all, especially in the matter of ministry, of the use of the gifts, and in participating in signs and wonders. It is that old problem met in Eden, namely the possession and use of power. Sadly

enough we all have 'hidden agendas'. Many of us do not recognize that we are driven by many thrusts of our personalities.

We need to see the answer to hidden motives and agendas. The answer is to be justified by grace, through faith, and then to stand on the ground of grace, continually. Only he who is justified and lives by faith in that justification, does not seek to justify himself. Once justified—by God—he has no need for self-justification. If at any point he is wrong, he is free to admit this, and if not, then he does not have to create an artificial justification of himself.

None of us can stand being inferior. We spend most of our lives on 'cosmetic living', i.e. on that 'make-up' and 'cover-up' which constitutes much—if not most—of human living. By this I mean that we are always trying to prove, vindicate and justify ourselves. Hence we must not be left behind on any score. This would go for the using of gifts and the doing of signs and wonders.

Let us envisage a pastor who feels inferior, is insecure and so, unsure of himself. His pastoral ministry will have a powerful drive to prove himself, perhaps by the building up of a large and active congregation. It may well be that numbers will figure largely; he will not wish to lose any of the flock, and may even bend over backwards to retain members. In so doing he may fear to confront people with the truth. Even worse he may find himself resorting to all kinds of methods—and even techniques—to keep his members and to add to them. He may be a pastor who has never even questioned whether 'church growth' is a necessary thing, and even—always—a good thing. As is often said—sadly enough—power and numbers

are the name of the game!

Equally foolish will be the persons who seek to prove themselves by the use of gifts. With a drive to be seen and even admired, prophecies may be done by us, heal-ings attempted, and the doing of miracles sought after. Although we do not realize it, it is that drive of the 'hidden agenda' which moves us in certain directions. Of course—this being the case—we will find ourselves in competition with each other, and that competition can often prove to be very fierce. Could this be what Paul is speaking about in I Corinthians 13:1–3? Could it deteriorate into 'peddling God's word'? Could it be an action of building with wood, hay, stubble and straw instead of gold, precious metals and rare jewels?

It could even be possible that human psychic powers would be employed—even if sincerely—by some, and this in order to 'get things going', i.e. to move people in worship, to gain their admiration and even adherence by what one does. None of this is to be thought humorous, or of little consequence. We cannot afford to give fervent prophecies that are directive and affect people's lives. We must not be about healing unless it is done in the Lord's way. Indeed every gift should be regarded as holy, and we should be seen as responsible to God for, and in using it.

The Matter of Human Attainment

We know that Satan is driven by compulsive guilt, and is pushed on to prove himself in history. His highest aim seems a noble one—to be like (indeed, as) the Most High

God. By nature of the case such attainment is impossible. Yet he persists, being deluded, being the father of lies, and being unable to live in the truth.

No less, sadly enough, does man delude himself into thinking he can, of his own volition and efforts, attain personal righteousness. It is Paul who opens up this whole subject. He sees how dangerous it is to move from God's grace to human self-effort, and this especially so when it is the matter of establishing our own righteousness. On one occasion he had to confront his fellow-apostle Peter with this very thing (cf. Gal. 2:11-16). How many of us recognize the enormous drive within ourselves to accomplish this?

Paul dreaded ever having any kind of righteousness which was his own. He wanted to be found in Christ, 'not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith' (Phil. 3:9). For Paul to have his own righteousness in any degree what-ever would have been misery. Self-righteousness can only bring misery to man. The Judaisers who had come to the Galatian Christians knew of the latent drive-even in believers-to justify themselves by works of the law, and they sought to cash in on this predilection. Paul knew the drive that many Corinthians had to prove themselves. He consequently debunks the power-complex-i.e. what we call 'Christian triumphalism'. He elevates human weakness so that grace may be magnified, but it is salutary for us to think about these things lest the wrong use of words, deeds, the use of gifts and sharing in signs and wonders corrupt us from the simplicity that is in Christ.

**A False Righteousness Engendered
by the Use of Gifts, Works,
and Signs and Wonders**

James enjoins believers to have a life of faith that issues in works, and this fits what we have said above. We have seen in John's Gospel that Jesus not only did signs but also works. Whilst all signs are works, not all works are signs, in the strict sense of that word. Works issue from the grace of justification and sanctification. It is possible, however, to see works only as the operations of the gifts. Indeed it is possible, almost, to despise any work not done through or from a gift. Subtly one can be led into a 'gifts-righteousness' which is really a form of 'works-righteousness', and then one has unconsciously abandoned the principle of grace-reliance for one's works.

This also goes for the works of social action such as helping the poor, the mentally and physically handicapped, the starving people of other nations, the under-privileged of all kinds, and those who are debilitated through age. Such concern, pity and practical help are enjoined by the Father, but again we have to watch that our works do not become the cause of self-righteous pride.

Another and more deadly form of self-righteousness is the use of power to help and even control people. Those with spiritual gifts can-even if unconsciously-be like Simon Magus in Acts 8 who was 'saying that he himself was somebody great', i.e. that he could do great and supernatural things. There are occultic operations which seem to be within the reach of human beings, and some

may pose as being 'spiritual' when in fact they are not, even though they may have certain psychical energies or powers. The desire in humans to control others, act as God to them or become priestly and therefore mediatorial, is a very strong power wish. It also has the old self-justifying drive—the goal of being 'someone'.

It is in the area of works, the use of gifts, and participation in signs and wonders that we have to be most careful of all.

**A Timely Warning Against Over-reaction
to Deeds, Gifts, Signs and Wonders**

We must always be careful not to 'throw out the baby with the bath-water'. It has been suggested that in reaction to the faulty use of gifts and to the human psychic induction of signs and wonders, we may be throwing out not a guileless baby, but a tiger with the bath-water! By 'tiger' we do not mean a cruel and voracious creature but rather a 'tiger in the tank', that is to say true power, a genuine spiritual dynamic, which may mean that in reactionary rejection of God's gifts and His attesting actions, we are actually rejecting His true ways of legitimate and functional power.

In I Thessalonians 5:19–20 we are told, 'Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast what is good'. Whilst this has been interpreted variously, it has primarily been thought to mean, 'In no way quench [drown, suppress] the Spirit, resisting him in what he does. He speaks via prophecy and to reject prophecy is to reject him. At the same time test the prophesying to see whether it is true or not. In

fact test all things and hold firmly the things that pass this testing'.

Later we will be speaking about the word of God, but if the word of God comes through gifts, deeds, words and works of others—including signs and wonders—then do not reject any of that word. On the other hand if someone is seeking to manipulate another—or others—by the use of these things, then we should resist that direct approach.

**CONCLUSION TO THE EVIL OR
FALSE USE OF GIFTS, SIGNS
AND WONDERS**

Our conclusion is self-obvious, i.e. (a) evil wishes to establish itself by any and every means, and somehow has recourse to certain works, gifts, signs and wonders, so that we must discern whether in fact what we see is of God or Satan; (b) man, likewise, seeks to establish himself and will use any means to do so—whether consciously or unconsciously. We need to be on the alert at all times, and seek to discern the real from the false, always remembering that we ourselves may have come into error.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

**THE WORD OF GOD
IN ITS TRUE NATURE****THE TRUE WORD OF GOD**

Whilst our book purports to be primarily concerned with the doing by God of signs, wonders, and mighty works, especially as they are related to God's word, His plan and His purposes, yet in fact this book is primarily concerned with the proclamation of the word of God. This is because man needs to know God, and that very knowledge of Him (though not mere knowledge about Him) is eternal life. This is seen by a careful reading of John 17:3 and I John 5:20, and these two Scriptures are directly related to Jeremiah 9:23–24. Both John and Jeremiah make the point that to know God—a relational matter—is also to understand Him. This kind of revelation Moses received when he requested to see the glory of God (Exod. 33:12–33; 34:5–7).

Insofar as works, signs and wonders and the use of gifts are able to communicate this word of God, they are valuable, but insofar as they are merely phenomena—if

that can be the case—then they are of limited value. What we need to see in this part of our study is the nature and value of the word of God itself.

THE ONLY TRUE WORD/S

God's speaking is from Himself and His wisdom. If man speaks from God because God has given him his words and so he speaks oracles of God (I Pet. 4:11; cf. Num. 12:6–8), then his words are true. If not, then they are not true. Isaiah 55:6–11 indicates that man's thoughts are not God's thoughts. This may mean (a) that God has a greater capacity for thoughts, or (b) that the mind of fallen man is of another disposition. Whilst it is true God's capacity is greater than man's, it does not mean man cannot understand what God is thinking and saying if God chooses to communicate. Without repentance, faith, and a God-affected will, man cannot hear what has been said by God. That the Scriptures constitute God's word is strongly debated by many. This inscripturated truth—along with the present working of the Triune God—is our only means of knowing truth (John 17:17; Ps. 33:4; cf. II Tim. 3:16–17). Even though God communicates through many media the Scriptures themselves tell us this fact.

**THE SUBSTANCE AND SUBJECT
OF GOD'S WORD**

Man created by God correlates to Him as a son (to the Father), a creature (to the Creator), and a servant (to the

King). He can only know what God reveals. God is wise, and He has His own counsel. God's counsel is His will, His plan for history, and His acts in working out history (see Isa. 46:8–12; 48:3–8; Jer. 23:23ff.; Eph. 1:9–11; 3:8–12). Thus man can only discover counsel, i.e. wisdom—as far as is necessary for him to do so—by listening to God, and reading His acts in history. If God were not to speak there would be no communication from Him, and none to man. Man would know nothing but his research into the phenomenological facts of man and creation. Apart from the inscripturated truth, man cannot have an ontology of God, man, and creation, i.e. his theology, anthropology and cosmology will always be deficient, because unsubstantiated. Man— for things ultimate—cannot rely on his own thought and reasoning.

GOD'S MODES OF SPEAKING

God's word comes through many media, i.e. creation (Ps. 19:1–4), theophanies or manifestations of Himself (Gen. 18:1f.; Exod. 3:2f.), angelic visitants (Gen. 28:10–17), the law (Ps. 119; cf. Deut. 33:1ff.), His own acts throughout history, the prophets (Num. 12:6; Deut. 18:15ff.; Jer. 23:23f.), Jesus Christ the Logos (John 1:18; cf. 6:63), the Spirit (II Pet. 1:20–21; John 16:12–15) and the church—the proclaimers of truth. Note that the Scriptures, themselves, inform us concerning these media. It is not good enough to say that God speaks in words and deeds (John 14:10–14; cf. Rom. 15:18–19; cf. Jer. 23:23ff.).

His words are His deeds, His deeds His words, and the two are the one.

THE WORD IS ALL

When we look at the various forms and modes of the Word of God, and recognize that God and His word are identical then we see that nothing happens without the word. This is because the word of God is powerful (Heb. 4:12) and effective (Rev. 19:13, 15) and as the word, it is never apart from the Holy Spirit. Together they are one in action and power.

In practice this means we have the word of God for pastoral ministry. Primarily this is kerugmatic (evangelistic proclamation). This salvific word is also the word of true healing, and at the same time it is didactic in the context of the church, where it is ministered for the benefit of all so that it is pastoral in all aspects. The church itself is proclaiming the word to the world both soteriologically and prophetically, and all of this in the context and operation of salvation history.

THE WORD OF GOD IS POWERFUL

Anyone acquainted with the Scriptures knows that they claim that the word of God is innately powerful (cf. II Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 4:12–13). God cannot speak and His intention not be effected (Isa. 55:11). When we preach or proclaim, we are often disappointed because we are not wholly effective, or even partly effective. We

think, 'If the word of God is powerful, how come we do not see the results which ought to follow?'. It may be because we are not truly proclaiming the word, and it may be that sowing and husbandry are lacking. It may be that when we are—seemingly—not being heard, the word of God is being rejected. Being accepted or rejected is not the point (cf. Isa. 6:9–13; Jer. 2:31; Matt. 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:39–41; Acts 28:26–27; Rom. 11:8; Acts 13:40–41; Rom. 10:16; 11:7ff.; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

In the Old Testament the word of God (*dabar*) is used about 400 times. John Taylor (New Bible Dictionary, IVP, Eng. 1986, p. 1259) says, 'Yahweh's word is an extension of the divine personality, invested with divine authority, and is to be heeded by angels and men'. It is the word by which God communicates to man, and which cannot be divorced from Him any more than can His law. Thus 'the word of the Lord came', and 'thus says the Lord' are the terms used and they must be heard and obeyed. The power of the word polarizes its hearers. They either obey or disobey.

In the New Testament the words *logos* and *rhema* equal the *dabar* of the Old Testament and are used synonymously in the LXX. Just as Yahweh's *dabar* is identified with God and so is dynamic, so too *logos* and *rhema* are dynamic.

THE POWER OF THE WORD IN ITS MANY ASPECTS

What we will now treat is the word of God in its various aspects. God's word is simply His speaking, but it relates

to many things—as we would expect. When below we categorize the word of God into the following aspects, we do not mean that there are many words of God or even many elements of the same word. It is all the one word of God, but to us—in God's history—it comes in the following categories which we then nominate:

(i) **The Word of God.** The Scriptures tell us God's word is truth (Ps. 119:160; John 17:17; II Sam. 7:28; II Cor. 6:7; James 1:18), that it is eternal as the living (Heb. 4:12) and abiding word (I Pet. 1:23, 25) and is never ineffectual (Isa. 55:11). In fact God's word is as God Himself, inseparable from Him. It is the word of His counsel which means His wisdom and plan will be fulfilled in the ultimate. We can say that God's word relates to the ontological, and man's word cannot be such, seeing he is fallen. In a later study we will see that the forces of evil (including fallen man) steal God's word because it is innately dynamic.

(ii) **The Creative Word.** See Genesis 1:1f.; Psalm 33:6–9; 148:5–6; John 1:1–3; Hebrews 1:1–3; 11:3; Colossians 1:15–17. God's word dynamically creates so that its enormous power is incalculable (Eccl. 3:11). Creation alone should be sufficient to make man worship and be grateful (Rom. 1:19f.; cf. Ps. 19:1–3; Job chs. 38–42:6), and if man were not fallen—i.e. unresponsive to God's reality and truth—then he would be immensely awed by seeing and hearing the word of creation.

(iii) **The Continuing Creative Word.** See (a) the word which sustains, i.e. upholds, and by which there is

continuity in creation (Heb. 1:2–3; Col. 1:17). This creation can be called ‘a fixed order’ (Ps. 89:36–37; 148:5–6; Jer. 31:36–37) and such a ‘fixed order’ brings security to man. It is really affirmed in the Noahic covenant as promised in Genesis 8:20–9:7; (b) the new acts of creation on the principle of Romans 4:17 (see Isa. 44:26; 45:23; 46:10; 55:10–11; 59:21). God can and will do works which seem to be against the normative principle of the initial and sustaining word of creation.

(iv) **The Prophetic Word.** This word is continuous in both Old and New Testaments referring to every aspect of God’s will and counsel, namely creation, covenant, law, salvation, holy living, judgements, the day of the Lord, and all things eschatological. Two classic passages are (a) Deuteronomy 18:9–32 and (b) Jeremiah 23:23–32. ‘Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?’. In prophecy, God speaks through man (cf. Exod. 7:1–2; Num. 12:6–7; Amos 3:7–8; Acts 2:17ff.; cf. Rev. 1:3; 22:18–19). This word comes by God speaking face to face (Num. 12:6–7), through dreams and visions (Num. 12:6; Isa. 1:1; 2:1; Jer. 23:23–32; 23:15f.; Joel 2:28f.; Acts 2:17f.). Later we will see that the prophetic word is often related to the Spirit.

(v) **The Enacted Word.** By this we mean God is the living God, i.e. ‘the God who acts’. His acts reveal Him, portraying His nature. The kind of things He does shows who He is (see Ps. 105–107; especially 105:8ff.; 107:1ff.). In the New Testament the enacted word is the word of the Kingdom (Matt. 12:28; cf. Acts 8:5–8, 14).

The *enacted word* is also seen in the judgements of the book of Revelation. In fact all history is the enacted word, e.g. ‘he commanded and they were created’.

(vi) **The Word of the Law.** See Deuteronomy 33:1–5; Exodus 24:1–8; Acts 7:38; Galatians 3:19. We must warn ourselves against detaching the law of God from God. No one can create true law: no one dare initiate torah which in fact means ‘instruction’ and as such shows ‘the way’ of God. There is only one way (see Exod. 34:28f.; with Deut. 4:13; 30:11, 14). Psalm 119 has the terms, way, word, truth, precepts, ordinances, testimonies, works, statutes as virtually synonymous. The law must not be subverted on pain of death (cf. Gal. 3:10), but obedience to it is ‘sweeter than honey’ for it is a delight to meditate on His law (Ps. 19:7–11; 1:2).

(vii) **The Word of Redemption–Old Testament.** This begins with Genesis 3:15 (cf. Gen. 49:10) and comes in covenant to Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3; ch. 15; 17:1–14). In the midst of the revelation of fallen man’s sinfulness and guilt, the redemptive word blazes with the revelation of God’s grace.

(viii) **The Word of Redemption–New Testament.** This is the word of grace (John 1:14; Matt. 1:21; Titus 2:11). See also Acts 4:33; 11:13, 14; 13:43; 14:26; 15:40; 20:32. This word of grace is also the word of faith (cf. Deut. 30:14f.; Rom. 10:8f.; 1:16–17; I Cor. 1:18). This salvific word contains in itself the regenerating word as seen in John 6:63; I Peter 1:3, 22–23; James 1:18.

(ix) **The Sanctifying Word.** See John 15:3; 17:17; cf. Hebrews 1:3; 9:14; etc. The redemptive word is also the word of judgement. Guilt and pollution are the two things which keep man in bondage when they beset him, in the light of the holiness and wrath of God. His judgements set His people free, although they destroy the obdurate impenitent. Often in Isaiah God said 'I am the Holy One of Israel—thy Redeemer'. His holiness is always dynamic—opposing and destroying the evil that would destroy His people.

THE SPIRIT, THE WORD, AND THE POWER

When preaching sometimes we do our best to make the word of God powerful. We seem to think it cannot—of itself—be powerful, and we must adorn it, or use persuasion to convince our hearers of its reality and validity. Paul warned against this on a number of occasions—I Corinthians 1:17; 2:2–5; II Corinthians 2:17; 4:2—because this sort of persuasion weakens the true proclamation. We insert our attestation, and thus supplant (a) the power of the word itself, to convince, and (b) any signs and wonders God may determine to do, the word being left to itself. Man—even redeemed man—still has to do battle with evil, including Satanic deception, human pride in achievement, the desire to be praised and other such personal fleshly elements. Most of all he has to fight the desire to be thought wise, and to be able to reveal the truth from himself. He must be born of the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and continually walk in the

Spirit by being continually filled with the Spirit.

If man is not in the state of Spirit—control then he cannot preach the word of truth—God's word. He must be in that state of grace where his faith is strong. This is because there can never be a division between the word and the Spirit. I Thessalonians 1:5 demonstrates this principle: 'Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction'. A vast study could be undertaken on 'the Spirit and the Word', but it is enough for us to know that in the Old Testament the prophets spoke the word of God by the Holy Spirit. In Numbers 24:2ff. the Spirit came upon Balaam and he prophesied. In II Samuel 23:1–7 David, seized by the Spirit, spoke the oracle of God. In Hosea 9:7 the prophet is equated with 'the man of the spirit'. Both I Peter 1:10–12 and II Peter 1:20–21 speak of the prophets of old being moved by the Holy Spirit—also known as 'the Spirit of Christ'. It is safe to conclude that the word of God cannot be spoken in all its awesome and holy truth apart from the Spirit of God.

At the time of the Reformation there were discussions as to whether the word of God was powerful in itself, or powerful through the Spirit. Both are mutually inclusive and as one entity the word and the Spirit work, and work with power. God is identical with His word, even if we call that word 'an extension of the divine personality'. If we can visualize the word apart from the Spirit, or the Spirit working (soteriologically) apart from the word, then we have a strange and impossible situation. Previously we stated that the power for response by the hearer lies in the word of command. The man with the withered arm stretched forth his hand when commanded,

but 'in the natural' that was an impossible act. All the power of God lies in the commanded word, and sin is doubly reprehensible when that word is resisted (cf. Acts 7:51).

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE WORD OF GOD AND ITS PROCLAMATION IN POWER

THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PROCLAMATION

A look at a Greek concordance will show that some six verbs are used regularly in the New Testament which have very much the same meaning, and are linked with the proclamation of the Gospel. They are *anaggello* (report), *apaggello* (bring tidings), *diaggello* (proclaim), *euaggelizo* (bring good news), *kataggello* (proclaim, announce), and *kerysso* (proclaim). *Ginomia* (come to be, happen, be) and *gnorizo* (to make known) are used only once. What is common about all of them is that they

constitute something, i.e. a message which has authority and demands attention, evaluation and decision on the part of the hearer.

For the preacher who is announcer and proclaimer this has significance. His proclamation is not from himself. It is from God, and through the preacher God demands a response. The proclamation, truly given is always effective, i.e. either for acceptance and obedience or for rejection and (so) disobedience.

THE AUTHORITY FOR PROCLAMATION

This is seen clearly in Matthew 28:18: 'And Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age"'. In Luke 24:44f., Mark 16:16f., John 20:20–23 and Acts 1:8 much the same claim and information is given. In Acts 1:2 is a commentary on these passages, i.e. Jesus gave commandments through the Holy Spirit, and ended by saying (Acts 1:8) that when the Spirit came upon them they would receive power and witness to him throughout the world. The authority was Christ's but then that authority was under the Father. Thus the Christian proclaimer—whoever he or she may be—goes in the authority of the Father and the Son. Romans 10:15 asks, 'How can men preach unless they are sent?'. This Scripture shows that *none* can go

authentically until sent: then that one has full authority, and must be listened to as he proclaims. One would normally conclude that a person ordained to the pastoral ministry has authentically been sent.

RESPONSIBILITY WITH AUTHORITY

All authority carries responsibility. When one is responsible for proclaiming the word of God then that is the greatest responsibility of all. Such a one must have the mind of God, and of Christ, and walk with the utmost humility, never deflecting from the word, and never inserting the word of man, no matter how at–tractive and wise it may sound. The following quotes show us how solemn and responsible a thing it is to proclaim the true word of God, the living truth as it is in Him.

'Divine revelation is more than the disclosure of supranatural knowledge concerning the nature and purposes of God' (R. H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching*, p. 151).

'Revelation is the self–bestowal of the living God . . . God in the act of imparting Himself' (P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 10).

' . . . we are now more aware that it is God Himself who speaks in the proclamation. Preaching is not talking about God; it is allowing God to talk. The words of the preacher are simply the medium through which the Divine Word comes. It is God who speaks' (Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 154).

‘Preaching is the immediate, powerful, personal self-communication of the eternal Word to men’ (C. K. Barrett, *Biblical Preaching and Biblical Scholarship*, p. 4).

‘Preaching has a single purpose, that Christ might come to those who have assembled to listen’ (Gustaf Wingren, *Predikan; en principiell studie*, p. 296, quoted by Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 154).

‘As the preacher proclaims the divine act of re-demption, the barriers of time are somehow transcended and that supreme event of the past is once again taking place. God’s historic Self-disclosure has become a present actuality’ (Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 153).

‘Preaching does more than recount and explain the ancient event. The Spirit makes the ancient event in a very real sense an event even now transpiring, and the preaching is a medium of the Spirit’s action in do-

ing so. In the preaching, when it is truly itself, the

event is continuing or is recurring (John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching*, p. 92, quoted by Mounce, *op. cit.* p. 153).

‘[Preaching] is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself’ (P. T. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 3).

‘Only authentically biblical preaching can be really relevant; only vitally relevant preaching can be really biblical’ (John Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 27, quoted by Mounce, *op. cit.*, p. 153).

‘There is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot’ (Jeremiah 20:9).

‘. . . you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers’ (Paul, *I Thess. 2:13*).

THE MODE OF PROCLAMATION

If we keep in mind that the proclamation is not only the word given by the proclaimer, but is in the context of the whole church in its witnessing role as the kerugmatic, prophetic, priestly, and royal community, living in love and fellowship, endowed with the gifts of ministry and the other gifts (charismata), then we can see, again, that there is a context in which proclamation is made. Not only are those addressed by the word expected to respond, but they are invited into the holy community— Christ’s body, the church.

We have a good picture of the apostolic mode in Romans 15:14–21. In particular let us look at verses 18–19: ‘For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit’. From this we can see the order, (a) word and deed, (b) the power of signs and wonders, and (c) the power of the Holy Spirit. We have previously dealt with this. Briefly we can repeat that when Paul preached the word then deeds accompanied that proclamation, i.e. (a) Paul and his companions lived in godliness and love, suffered without complaint and ‘adorned the teaching’; (b) others heard, responded, were saved and formed a new church, showing the same spirit as the proclaimers who had come to them; (c) on many occasions—if not all—God attested to the word proclaimed by doing signs and wonders (e.g. Acts 14:3) which thus showed (i) the power of God, (ii) the authentic ministry of the proclaiming team, and (iii) all of this was accomplished through and by the

power of the Holy Spirit, i.e. the word, the deeds, and the signs and wonders.

Down through the history of the church there have been times when Paul's mode—i.e. as in Romans 15:17–18—has been reproduced, especially in revivals, and more often in revivals or the initial preaching of the Gospel in the third world. Even so, we should have faith and expectancy that God will attest to our proclamation, and that it will be proved fruitful.

THE POWER OF PROCLAMATION

Whilst we have partly dealt with this subject above, we still have to see that terms such as 'gospel', 'word of the cross' and 'the word of grace' all insist on the innate power of the word. Whilst I Thessalonians 1:5 says, 'Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction', he is not inferring that 'word only' means the word lacks power, but that the word was not preached apart from the Spirit. The word cannot really be authentically preached apart from the Spirit for the two together constitute the one act of proclamation. If the word is denoted as 'living' and the Spirit—as we know—is living, then it is correct to speak about the two, although we do not hypostasize the word. We simply remember that God and His word cannot be separated.

We are now in a position to draw our final conclusion to the book in regard to the word of God, the attestation by God of the word proclaimers and the word pro-claimed, and the place of signs and wonders, the spiritual

gifts, and the works of the church in the service of that proclamation.

A NECESSARY CONCLUSION REGARDING THE MATTER OF GOD'S WORD AND ITS POWER

Our last two sections have been devoted to an examination and exposition regarding the matter of God's word. Throughout it we have not defined what we mean by the term 'God's word' although we have spoken about various aspects of it. Do we mean by it 'the Bible', and if so do we mean just the text of the Scriptures? Do we mean that the very text has some kind of supernatural being, so that even the quoting of it will produce results? No, we mean none of this. We mean that whatever God has communicated to man through His various media—the Scriptures, the law, the prophetic utterances, the theophanies and angelic visitations, the acts which He has done and does, the incarnate life of His Son, the Son's works including his miracles, death, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Spirit, His various signs and wonders in history, the works of the church, the communications of the Holy Spirit, and the word which goes on being uttered authentically through the Spirit—all these elements constitute the word of God.

Just as always, so now, when the word of God is proclaimed then living things happen. Hostile humanity rebels and reacts, faithful or potentially faithful humanity responds. Actions take place when the word of God informs, commands, invites response and warns against

rejection of the truth. Events which happen such as use of gifts, acts of love—and so on—are not to be seen as separate from the word but the word itself livingly accomplishing, because the word of God is God in the very act of communicating.

When we realize this then we do not confine the word to the preaching or teaching of a person, and certainly not to the fine exegesis or examination of the text by a theologian, critic or even a preacher. The word of God then is the dynamic communication of God through whatever medium He chooses, and for whatever purpose He proclaims. It is the living God in action!

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

**THE CHURCH GROWING
UNDER GRACE
AND LOVE**

THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD

In I Timothy 3:15 Paul speaks of ‘the household of God, which is the church of the living God’. We have seen that ‘living God’ means ‘the God who gives life’, but even more ‘the God who acts’. God is the living God because He has first acted to create, then to sustain that creation –a work always continuing—and throughout time has worked His will in and through the events of the history He has planned and is fulfilling. We have seen that He does not so much ‘irrupt into history’, break into ‘the fixed order’, and come into ‘the natural’ as He works within His own creation, being locked neither into or out of it.

We have seen the really marvellous thing is that God can and does act when He wills, and although this may

even seem strange to us, His actions are never whimsical, never just off the cuff, never arbitrary but always with the purpose of assuring the human race that He is not separated from it. What we call 'salvation history' is the evidence of this action. Within salvation history, God does not always operate by signs and wonders and unusual events. For the most part action succeeds action, but when it is necessary God works in unusual ways.

THE BIRTH OF A CHURCH

The community of faith is born through the word of God (Rom. 10:9–17). This work is never only spoken, but it is enacted, i.e. the mind is informed and convinced, especially as the heart is gripped and affected by the love of God in the Gospel of Christ and his Kingdom. The word brings the response of faith and repentance so that the miracle of forgiveness, cleansing and justification follows. Where there has been no community of faith previously, the new community is now formed under the living God. From that point onwards men and women who come to faith join this living community. It is their true and natural home.

THE COMMUNITY UNDER GRACE AND THE WORD OF GRACE –THE GOSPEL

This community is equipped from the beginning with 'the word of grace' which is continually operating, though

never apart from the Spirit of God. It is interesting to notice the term 'the word of grace', for grace was (a) the saving word (Acts 15:11; 18:27; 20:24), and (b) the word which kept them living in the new life (Acts 13:43; 20:32). 'Grace' and 'the word of his grace' were identical, thus when anyone was 'commended to the grace of God' (Acts 14:26; 15:40) this was the same as being 'commended to the word of his grace' (20:32; cf. 14:3, 26). This means that there is no difference between 'grace' and 'the word of God', for God is both Speaker and Doer—grace never being absent from Him. Thus 'the word of grace' and 'the word of God' and the 'word of the Gospel' are one as can be seen from Romans 1:16–17; I Corinthians 1:18; I Thessalonians 1:5; I Peter 1:12 and Hebrews 4:12.

Grace and the Spirit of God

In Acts 4:24–30 we have the prayer of the new church on behalf of the apostles who had been ordered by the Sanhedrin (Jewish parliament of 70 elders) to cease preaching. Part of their prayer was, 'And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants [the apostles] to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus'.

We are told the immediate answer was that all present were filled with the Holy Spirit, even though all had been previously filled. This special infilling brought them to be 'of one heart and one soul' so that no one thought anything was his own, but shared it with others, and the apostles with great power gave testimony to the

resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This brought them to a certain state, i.e. 'and great grace was upon them all'.

We need to see that the life of the new church is unity, and power to witness, both of which come from being under 'great grace'. In Acts 11 Barnabas saw the grace of God in the new church at Antioch in Syria. In Acts 6:8 Stephen was 'full of grace and power' and 'did great wonders and signs among the people'. These three instances of grace are also three occasions of the working of the Holy Spirit and are connected with signs and wonders.

The Life and Importance of Grace

Even reading the passages in the Acts which portray the life of the church causes our pulses to quicken. There was the sense of Christ's presence, the immediacy of life in Christ, the adventure of telling out the Gospel, and the joyous anticipation of God moving by His presence. As Israel knew God to be in the pillar of cloud by day and the column of fire by night, as also it was aware of His dwelling in the holy of holies, between the cherubim, so too the early church lived in the miracle of His personal presence and His accompanying work. The Father worked with Christ (I Cor. 15:24-28), Christ worked through the Spirit (Eph. 3:16; Rom. 8:9-11; Acts 16:6-10; Gal. 5:16-18, 25-26), whilst the church consciously lived and walked in the Spirit.

The terms 'grace', 'the grace of God', 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ', 'great grace', 'the word of his grace', 'the gospel of grace'—all mentioned in Acts—are words we must hear again in our own day. In the apostolic

letters we have terms such as 'the gift of grace', 'the abundance of grace', 'the reign of grace', 'election of grace', 'abundant grace', 'surpassing grace', 'the glory of his grace', 'the immeasurable riches of his grace', 'the gift of grace', 'good hope through grace', 'strong in the grace', 'justified by grace', 'the throne of grace', 'the spirit of grace', 'strengthened by grace', 'the grace that is to be revealed', 'the varied grace', 'the true grace', and 'the God of all grace'.

An Excursus: Grace in the History of the Church

Church history shows us that the living grace of God is often neglected when men and women 'receive the grace of God in an empty way' (II Cor. 6:1-2), i.e. when life ceases to be lived in the recognition of personal weakness. When we become 'triumphalist' and forget that only when we are weak are we truly strong, and only at that point can grace be sufficient for us, then the subtle change from grace-dependence to personal power operations begins to take place.

When the church goes into the dark tunnel of human effort then it loses spiritual power, becomes materialistic and political on the one hand or ascetic and separatist on the other. It took the Reformation to open up the great truth of grace again, and this helped to change the face of Europe and introduce what we call 'modern history'. The rise of the Puritans who desired to see life lived richly in true grace brought a fresh flow of living in grace, and consequently Great Britain came into the magnificent Evangelical Revival of the 18th century. The sermons and

hymnology of that period testify to 'great grace' and a rich understanding of its power.

Two movements followed the Evangelical Revival, one being the Holiness Movement of the late 19th century—in which personal purity of life was stressed—and the other being the Pentecostal Movement, which happened early in the 20th century. In the mid-fifties of this century a movement related to the Pentecostal Movement commenced, called 'the Charismatic Movement'. It felt called upon to draw attention to living life in the Holy Spirit, especially in regard to using the gifts (charismata) of the Spirit.

It is not easy to stand back and discern the nature and value of these latter movements. It may be that we are too close to them. There are, however, certain criteria by which we can measure them—and this we must do. The criteria—as I see them—are (a) whether we live and ex-pound the apostolic truth which is the foundation of the true church, (b) whether we do this in the apostolic way, such as we outline immediately below, and (c) whether all that we do is through the grace of God and His Spirit.

THE CHURCH GOES AND GROWS

From the beginning the church has known the presence and power of its Lord. He did not depart from it when it was born, but has remained as its living and organic Head. The church has always had two functions, (a) to continue to sound out the word of grace—the Gospel—to others, and (b) to help others—within its own body—to grow into maturity, particularly in the context of a

living, loving, unified community. An understanding of these principles will aid us in bringing to birth and establishing new churches today. It will also help us to see the lines on which the Lord will renew churches which may have come into error and decay—churches such as those set out in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Revelation.

THE CHURCH GROWS BY PROCLAIMING THE WORD OF TRUTH TO OTHERS

The church at Thessalonica is a good example of what a church should be and do. On receiving the Gospel, this church began to sound it out both by proclamation of the good news and their manner of living (1:6–10). They were not 'curled into themselves', i.e. a closed inward looking community. Having been redeemed they wished to redeem. This marvellous salvation fully occupied their thoughts (cf. Rom. 1:14–17). In I Peter 2:9 the church is told, 'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'.

The church then took up the battle against the powers of darkness, and for this it needed the word of power, the presence of Christ its Lord, the power of the Spirit, the weapons of warfare, and—doubtless—the action of God in attesting to its authenticity in whatever way He would see fit, which could well include 'signs and wonders'.

THE CHURCH GROWS BY BEING BUILT UP WITHIN THE BODY AS PERSONS AND A PEOPLE

In Colossians 1:28–29 Paul shows the goal of true ministry: ‘Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ’. In another place he says, ‘the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith’.

The Church Is Built Up by the Gifts of God

Ephesians 4:7–16 tells us one of the ways of developing to maturity, namely via the gifts of ministry, for all are ‘for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ’. The gifts of ministry, then, help the body to grow and mature. We shall shortly look at the ‘how’ of this, and simply observe here that personal and corporate maturity are a primary aim within the life of the church.

In I Corinthians 12:4–30 we have a full exposition of the gifts of the Spirit. Again these gifts—usually called the charismata (gifts from grace—plural) are for the betterment of the body, and to no little degree for ministry to those outside the church. It would seem on the whole they are primarily for those in the church—‘for the common good’. We have already commented that gifts,

services and workings are all in the one bundle and none should be considered apart from the others.

These gifts are used for the unity and harmony of the church. They involve spiritual perception and discernment, spiritual exhortation and edification. In many ways they supply the needs of people, needs which are material, relational, spiritual and emotional. Gifts should always be used in love, for the purposes of love, and never individualistically and for a person’s own special advancement. We know God’s love by His giving, and love is ever giving. Thus gifts which are ministerial minister to others, and gifts which bring love to their recipients by giving also encourage love. Indeed love is the test of the value of any gift which is exercised. As we have seen in I Corinthians 13:1–3 the use of gifts apart from love is pointless and fruitless.

The body which is composed of members who are ‘members one of another’ must be a unity and a harmony working together in all parts. This unity is one of love, and love comes to us by the Holy Spirit. Within the membership there will be many problems and whilst such problems are not always solved—not even by the use of gifts—yet we ought to use gifts to help those in need.

The Church Is Built Up by the Ministrations of Love

So many times love is mentioned in relationship to edification, i.e. the building up of the believing community. In I Corinthians 8:1 Paul said, ‘“Knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up’. In Romans 14:13–21 he urged ‘walking in love’ in regard to the weaker brother,

and further urged, 'Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding'. In Ephesians 4:9–16 he spoke of 'trusting it in love', and this via the means of the gifts, for 'we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love'.

We see then that gifts and love cannot be themselves and exist apart each from the other, and that love contributes towards maturity. This is so in Philippians 1:9–11 for when love abounds more and more than spiritual maturity and fruitfulness develop. Similarly this is so in I Thessalonians 3:11–13. Most of all in I Corinthians 13:4–12 we see the beautiful development which comes through growing in love. Spiritual knowledge and spiritual maturity by love bring us into a richer and purer knowledge of God. No wonder Paul calls this a 'still more excellent way', i.e. than even the way of gifts—rich and useful as they are.

Finally we see that the Spirit brings a harvest in our lives of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Here, then, is true spirituality and true maturity. Again—as in the case of the gifts—love comes by the Spirit. The Spirit floods our hearts with such love (Rom. 5:5), and Paul can say to the Ephesians 'I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints' and to the Colossians, Epaphras 'has made known to us your love in the Spirit'.

We must see that love is not some kind of commodity. When Paul said, 'God's love has been poured into our

hearts through the Holy Spirit', he certainly used a material image, but it was simply a figure. To know God is to love, and it is not only to love God in return for His love, but to love all others with that love—'We love, because he first loved us'. The living and experiential nature of this is known in a relationship—'He who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him'. Hence love is a life lived, and such living assures the church of its upbuilding in bodily growth. Grace and the use of the gifts of God—along with His provision of signs and wonders—only have their true operations and meaning in the context of love, i.e. in the action of love.

The Church is Built up by the Experience of Suffering

'*Per astra ad astra*'—an old motto—can be translated, 'Through trials to glory', which is a motto the church can adopt, for it is essentially biblical. Paul said, 'If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we endure, we shall also reign with him' (II Tim. 2:11–12) and, Peter added, 'Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin' (I Pet. 4:1). In another place Paul had said—in effect—'If we suffer with him we shall be glorified with him' (Rom. 8:17).

The subject of the church's suffering and its relation to growing in grace through gifts—along with signs and wonders—is for us one of the most sensitive of issues, and we proceed to it in our next section, 'The Church Working under the Two Ages'. However, let us here observe two things: (a) there can be no spiritual growth **without love**, and (b) **there can be no true love which does not suffer**.

CONCLUSION TO THE CHURCH GROWING IN GRACE AND LOVE

We conclude that to view the matters of God's action via signs and wonders and our participation in that action, as also its relationship to the growth of the church and the proclamation of the Gospel, requires us to recognize the need to live constantly under grace and love. Work without grace is the operation of human pride and of fleshly endeavour. Growth without love is not the growth given by God but is of human endeavour and as such is doomed to fail.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE CHURCH WORKING UNDER THE TWO AGES

CONFUSION REGARDING THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Confusion in regard to the nature of the church often results when we do not define our terms, or understand the purpose of the church in regard to eternity and its present operations in time. What add to this confusion are our preconceptions in regard to this world in which we live, and its ultimate destiny. In other words we try to accommodate our understanding of the church to fit our time-view and our world-view. A further element is our failure to understand the nature and function of the church in relation to the nature and function of the Kingdom of God. True understanding of these elements is vital to a true theology of God's actions within history and our participation in them.

THE PENULTIMATE AND ULTIMATE AGES

We are not presently living in the ultimate age. That is yet to come, and indeed it is called—in Scripture—‘the age [aeon] to come’. Jesus spoke of this age saying that ‘whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or the age to come’ (Matt. 12:32). He said that those who leave everything for his sake will receive eternal life in ‘the age to come’ (Mark 10:30). In Luke 20:34–35 he refers to it as ‘that age’ in contradistinction to ‘this age’. The age to come is really equated with ‘the new world’ (*paligennesis*) of Matthew 19:28 ‘when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne’. In his epistles Paul contrasted ‘this present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4; I Cor. 1:20; 2:6, 8) with ‘the age to come’, especially in Ephesians 1:21 where he said that Christ has been raised ‘far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come’. The writer of Hebrews said that his readers had ‘tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come’ (6:5).

What then is ‘the age to come’? It is the time depicted in heaven when all the judgements of God will have been executed and when the new heavens and the new earth will come into view, when the children of God will be raised from the dead, be glorified, receive their inheritance, be made a kingdom of priests to their God and reign upon the earth. It will be the time of the wedding of the Bride and the Lamb, the opening of the gates of the Holy City, and of holy bliss for all the elect of God.

There is something special about this new age which appeals to us, namely that everything will be renewed, perfect, and complete. God will dwell forever with His people, for they will be His sanctuary. Yes, ‘God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more’ (Rev. 21:1–4).

In the same context and speaking of the people of God it is said, ‘Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple; and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes’.

There are many other beautiful things said of the age to come—too numerous to include here, but in fact this age is the Paradise that man has always envisaged, particularly in his private dreams. Always the way to the Tree of Life and the Eden of God has been guarded by the cherubim and the flaming sword which turns every way to deny access to man. Man has planned his many ‘Edens’ and his many ‘swords of life’, but to no avail. Deeply down in his being, man has a hunger for the Paradise of God.

LIVING IN ‘THIS PRESENT EVIL AGE’

The terms *aeon* (age) and *kosmos* (world) are sometimes used interchangeably in the New Testament. I Corinthians

1:20 asks, 'Where is the debater of this age [aeon]? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world [*kosmos*]?' The world of God's creation is not evil, but the world-system of Satan is evil. Sometimes the world (*kosmos* or aeon) is referred to in a good sense, and sometimes in a bad sense. For example, Jesus talks about the disciples not being 'of this world', and of his sending them into the world. We are led to conclude that this world and time belong to God and are controlled by Him. Even so, the very time and space in which we live is troubled by Satan and his forces, even though they do not wholly control it. Just as 'righteous Lot' was 'vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds' (II Pet. 2:7), so true believers are vexed in this world, for 'the evil be ever mingled with the good', where the tares and the wheat grow together and bad fish are intermingled with the good.

We dislike living in this tension and 'long to put on our heavenly dwelling' (II Cor. 5:2), but we cannot avoid the tension. In our desire for the perfect—a drive that is ever with us—we may become striving perfectionists, and may even seek to be triumphalists, i.e. refuse to have anything less than total triumph, total success, and total victory. Unconsciously we will be seeking to make the penultimate age to be as the ultimate age. It is this we will now examine.

LIVING IN THE TENSION OF THE TWO AGES

In I Corinthians 10 Paul spoke of the temptations which assailed Israel when it was God's people in the wilder-

ness. He showed that they failed many times, were judged and punished. He told his readers—verse 11— 'Now these things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come'. The phrase 'the end of the ages' has been variously interpreted but it seems that the idea is as follows: 'There are two ages—the old and the new. Believers really belong to the new age, but have not yet entered into it in time. They have tasted of the 'age to come', i.e. have seen its powers and been affected by its operations in Christ, particularly in the operations of signs and wonders. Nevertheless they still belong to this age, and must continue to live within it. Really, they live in the intersection of the two ages or systems, never at home in that which is 'this present evil age', and never getting the total good of 'the age to come'. This is their tension.

There are many pictures of this in the Scriptures. The 'roll-call of the faithful' in Hebrews 11 gives many instances. No one walked by sight: all walked by faith. Abraham 'looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. Moses 'endured as seeing him who is invisible'.

Inability to Live in the Tension

In Romans 8:18–25 Paul showed his readers that at this present time creation is groaning for its release from 'its bondage to decay' when it will 'obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God', but now it is 'subjected to futility', i.e. cannot express its full vocational and functional thrust. Paul said that 'not only the creation [of which we too, are part],

but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies'. He is saying clearly that Christians suffer tensions—Christians who have the first fruits of the Spirit!

What we must now examine is the insidious perfectionism that some Christians hold, and generally without realizing it. This perfectionist drive comes because of numerous reasons: (a) because we are sinful we find it painful to live with existential guilt, i.e. not being what we ought to be, and not doing what we ought to do; (b) we have an ontological drive—by creation—to be perfect, for such perfection would be natural and normal were we not fallen; (c) our objective guilts are a burden to us—let alone the accusations from evil powers which come to us because of them, and we desire to be rid of even the ability to sin; (d) man is a 'becoming' creature, i.e. is moving to his true 'telos' or goal, for then—and only then—will he be complete; (e) most powerful of all is the fallen goal to become 'as God', i.e. each of us wishes to be a perfect entity, independent of God and other 'gods', to be self-ruling in sheer autonomous bliss! Moreover he will be in his true home—the Paradise of God. Then he will exercise his fully matured powers in eternity.

The Distaste for Suffering

Man dislikes suffering. He dislikes sickness and disease, any form of unease, any disharmony and dissonance in his universe. Whilst he may be caught up in doing evil he dislikes receiving evil. He steals, commits crimes, and even kills, but he hates others doing such things

against him. The Christian, also, can be caught in a dislike of suffering. On the one hand the presence of suffering and evil trouble him—especially when his God is accused of innate imperfection! He would wish all things to be 'nice'.

The same Christian may misread his Scriptures, and misunderstand God's actions. He desires this penultimate age to be as the ultimate, finds biblical references to support his claim that it can be so, and then goes out to make it to be so. Whilst the work of healing sicknesses is a right one, and whilst exorcisms of evil spirits is a correct thing to effect, yet it has never been intended that the church should change this penultimate age into the ultimate one.

We need to elaborate on this. Romans 8:22–23 shows us that believers groan in this present age, waiting for the age to come in which they will know resurrection and receive a body of glory. Romans 8:24–25 says, 'In this hope we were saved. *Now hope that is seen is not hope.* For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience'. Related to this idea—that what is being prepared for us for the future is not now present—Paul says in II Corinthians 5:7, 'for we walk by faith, not by sight'. If then we wish the age to come to be present now to sight, and wish that we live only in it then we are asking an impossibility. What then will we do in order to alter things? *We will seek to make the age to come to be the present age, or make the present age into the age to come.*

By nature of the case and in the order of God's plan such an action is impossible.

The Constant and Dynamic**Constraint of Hope**

Without hope we do not live. Paul says that faith, hope and love continually obtain, and we live by them, as we live in them. When we see signs and wonders they are reminders and assurances to us of the Kingdom of God, since they are part of the action of that Kingdom. The Kingdom for which we presently suffer (Acts 14:22; II Thess. 1:5) is the coming Kingdom. Every sign and wonder, therefore, can be an aid to faith and can strengthen our hope. In our section immediately above we have seen that we live in hope. It is good then to 'strengthen the hope', i.e. to set our hope upon the grace that is coming to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1:13). All the things of hope are of enormous significance, and without the Holy Spirit we could not understand 'the gifts bestowed on us by God' (I Cor. 2:9-13). The writer of Hebrews urges us to 'seize the hope set before us' (6:18), and John says that when we know him we will be like him, then everyone who has this hope in himself purifies himself, even as he—the Lord—is pure (I John 3:1-3). In Romans 8:18-25 Paul assures us that as we suffer so our hope becomes more and more substantial.

If we do not see supernatural or supranatural signs and wonders pertaining to the Kingdom, it does not mean there is little basis for hope. The Kingdom of God is not a matter merely, of eating and drinking, but it is 'righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 14:17). The fruit of the Spirit no less than the gifts of the Spirit assure our hearts concerning that Kingdom, and so

our hope is truly substantiated. We can live in the tension of two ages, and know the triumphs of the Father, His Son, and His Holy Spirit even though all hell be let loose against us. Certainly we are not only fortified by the signs of the Kingdom, for we live the very life of the Kingdom itself, whilst anticipating in hope its coming consummation.

Present Triumphalism and the Prosperity Drive

One current Christian philosophy argues much as follows: 'Suffering is not of the good order of things for it was never part of the true (ontological) order of things. Redemption has restored believing man to the true order of things, therefore suffering in physical, mental, emotional, moral and economic ways does not have to be the experience of believers. To the contrary—believers can have a life filled with material and spiritual blessings of the highest order. If they do not live at this level

and achieve total victory then it is because they lack understanding of a goodly Father and His provision for their needs—by faith! Thus it would appear that when a person suffers he is out of harmony with God and His universe, and has fallen short of the level at which he may live, i.e. he is deficient in his experience of "full salvation" '.

By the word 'triumphalism' we mean that approach to the Gospel and God by which a person lives continually in triumph and success. One can do this—ideally speaking—without failure, although some triumphalists would admit there are failures from time to time, even though

they do not have to be. When we define the terms ‘triumph’ and ‘success’ we mean that we have within, the power to succeed in the face of difficulties, and to triumph over all evil. Triumphalism tells us everything has happened, and at this moment there is nothing we cannot do—if we will—and so complete and uninterrupted victory is ours. This triumph means the believer never has to fail, and provided he will draw on the power or powers within himself, will continue to live in rich victory of life. Some triumphalists see prosperity as a sign and proof that they are following God’s will, for it would appear—at least to first sight—that in the Old Testament, blessing came to those who were obedient to God, and that poverty and suffering were signs of faithlessness, laziness and lethargy.

Again—says the triumphalist—we believers have those gifts that can change the world, even to the doing of great signs and wonders. We can use the capacities God has given us and build large congregations, dynamic churches. We can even invade areas hitherto closed off to us such as governments of nations. In other words, where the Christian church does not succeed it is only because we lack positive resolve, concerted effort, and faith that we can succeed—if we will! Some who hold a certain brand of Postmillennialism see the Christian church going from triumph to triumph until all in history comes under Christ’s complete sway.

In practice some triumphalists never fail, or believe they never fail and cannot understand another believer failing. They believe all can be healed, all delivered from demons, all converted and forgiven, equipped with gifts and weapons so that the church can irresistibly conquer

the world. None need ever remain sick, none need die of terminal disease. Such triumphalists despise those who show signs of weakness in faith and life. One example would be that a person dying of terminal illness is said –by certain triumphalists—to lack the faith which could undoubtedly heal him or her.

Behind all of this is the drive to perfection and the theology that God is out to tidy up the world through His people. People without ‘strong faith’ are often scorned, for triumphalists—despite all their seeming perfection—are generally impatient people.

An Evaluation of Triumphalism

A triumphalist reading our section immediately above would shake his head in pity and say, ‘Well of course we must triumph. This is what the Gospel is all about’, and he would wonder that his view should even be called in question. As we will see, there is a way of living in triumph through the sovereignty of God, the enabling victory of Christ and the indwelling Christ himself, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, but we will emphasize the fact that the believer of himself can accomplish nothing. Passages such as Romans 7:13–25, II Corinthians 3:4–6 show us our utter innate weakness, for ‘The way of a man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps’. The person who is a triumphalist holds the view that he can lay hold of powers, work events, and accomplish great things of himself. When faced with his triumphalism on this score he may deny that he believes he has such power innately, but in practice this is how he works.

The Truth of Victorious Living

Paul cried, 'Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere!' (II Cor. 2:14). He also cried, 'Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!' (I Cor. 15:57). He also pointed out that in the midst of persecution whilst 'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered', yet he also said, 'No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us!'. Moreover John writes to young men in the following vein, 'I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one'. He went on to say in the same letter, 'Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world', adding yet later, 'For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith'. When we add to this that the believer is dead to sin, dead to the flesh, dead to Satan and his powers, i.e. dead to the world, then such references would—at first sight—seem to support triumphalism.

That, however, is not the case. All our victories are wholly dependent upon Christ, the Father and the Spirit, and all are obtained in the face of fierce, unending and ruthless opposition by the forces of evil. That should be evident from the Scriptures cited above. There is such a thing as victorious living but it is known in the battle and struggle.

Only Strong When Weak

This is the great truth and principle that Paul brought to us. When we read his letters to the church at Corinth we

find that there were people there with more than an element of triumphalism. Listen to Paul speaking to them (I Cor. 4:8–23), 'Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings!'. His irony increases, 'And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!'. By contrast he shows the lot of the apostles, 'For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men'. He then increases the contrast between these triumphalists and the realist apostles, 'We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labour, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things'.

Statements like that shatter the idiocy of the self-delusioned strongly! When in I Corinthians 5:6 Paul said, 'Your boasting is not good', he was speaking in particular about a case of incest and the Corinthians' indifference to the matter. That 'boasting' however was related to many things such as elitism and excesses in regard to gifts, party-divisions within the church, bad human relationships, some disorders in worship, and taking one another to secular law-courts. This then was their triumphalism—their spiritual reigning! The irony of the matter is that in Romans 5:17 Paul talks about 'reigning in life', and in Ephesians 2:6 of being 'seated in heavenly places'. Such reigning is genuine, has been planned by

God and is effected by Him in this world, even in the face of much opposition. Even so, it is not a 'triumphalist' reigning. It is the reigning of genuine humility, wrought through dependence upon God, entirely lacking boast-fulness. Indeed it is the triumph of love, of the fruits of the Spirit and to the eye of a triumphalist may appear, even, to be failure.

Summing up our comments on triumphalism we must say that the Christian ought to live in triumph. In one sense there is no end to the triumph, joy and victory he can experience. He does reign with Christ, and he is seated with him-now-in heavenly places. He sees the power of God working in mighty ways, but the key to it all is 'in Christ Jesus' or 'through Christ Jesus'. We repeat that the way of a man is still not in himself. The believer has an incredible joy when he knows he is doing the will of God, even though it might not seem to be 'powerful'. The so-called weakness of his obedience will one day prove the source of rich fruitfulness, even if this is not apparent in the present. In no sense does he have to feel helpless, or inferior, nor need he feel restricted and frustrated. He triumphs 'in all these things'.

Paul the Weak

A patient reading of both Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians will show us that Paul played down the idea of competency which arises from one's self. Some examples are: 'I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me'; 'Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God'; 'We have this

treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us'; 'As poor, yet making many rich'; 'Who is weak, and I am not weak?'. We remember, too, that Paul could speak of 'fightings without and fears within', and even of the inability to rest until the matter of his communications with the Corinthian church was reported to him by Titus. When it was a good outcome, then he was able to come to peace (cf. II Cor. 2:12-13; 7:2ff.).

One important passage in regard to weakness is that of II Corinthians 1:3-11 which speaks of Paul suffering a painful affliction in Asia, so much so that 'we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Why, we felt that we had received the sentence of death'. He then goes on to say, 'but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead'. Not only must he rely on God for everything, but he was also saying, 'I knew that the answer to this dilemma would lie in Christ's raising of me from the dead, literally. Figuratively we were raised from the dead!'

It is not often recognized that Paul drew his understanding of 'strength-only-in-weakness' from Christ himself-of whom Paul was an ardent admirer and imitator (I Cor. 11:1). In II Corinthians 13:3-4 he wrote, 'He [Christ] was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God'. Then he speaks to the pastoral situation which requires strength and discipline. He shows that Christ did not have to be powerful in the eyes of men-powerful and mighty from the human point of view-but that he was content to fall into the ground and die as a seed of wheat, so that out of that seeming weakness and obscurity he would bring a rich harvest of authentic fruitfulness.

From II Corinthians 11:30–12:10 Paul brings in his pièce de résistance. He speaks in the partly veiled form of a person who was caught up into Paradise and saw things not lawful to utter—things which could make any person inordinately proud. It would seem that this person was Paul, and that he was in great danger of pride, hence he had to receive ‘a stake in the flesh’, which he de-scribed as ‘a messenger of Satan to harass me from being too elated by the abundance of the revelations given to me’. When he prayed for the removal of that harassment he was told, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in [your] weakness’. Paul’s response and lasting principle then became, ‘I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of God may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then,

I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong’. This is surely tantamount to saying, ‘I have discovered that no human flesh can be trusted to see itself as solely dependent on God. Give it cause to think it has seen or experienced special things and it will imagine it has some worth or merit of its own, and so it will begin to think that of itself it has certain powers and abilities. Paul’s advice is thus salutary when he says, ‘Let anyone who thinks that he stands [i.e. of his own strength, planning, effort and ability] take heed lest he fall’.

This principle of innate weakness is a far cry from the mindless triumphalism of the macho Corinthian Christians! We cannot but conclude that the way of weak-ness—as Paul both taught and lived it—is the way of true power, and authentic victory.

Passages That Go Against Thoughtless Triumphalism

We now look at certain biographical passages concerning Paul. When we read them we see that triumphalism is not part of the true Christian faith and ministry, though of course being led in triumph is part of that ministry. None of us could match Paul for power and doubtless this would be because we do not match his ‘weaknesses’. See, then:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you (II Cor. 4:7–12).

We put no obstacle in any one’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labours, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything (II Cor. 6:3–10).

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness (II Cor. 11:22–30).

Reading these biographical passages—along with other passages such as Hebrews 11:32–40; I Peter 4:1–2, 12–14; 5:6–11; Revelation 6:9–11; 13:9–10; 14:12–13— we realize that ‘all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution’, so that in this sense the truly victorious Christian is the one who suffers for the sake of the kingdom of God. We repeat that it is in all these things that we are more than conquerors, and not merely in spite of them.

A CONCLUSION REGARDING BEING WEAK AND STRONG IN THE TENSION OF THE TWO AGES

In this state in which we live do we have to choose between two ways of life, i.e. (a) absolute triumphalism,

and (b) absolute weakness? The answer must be, ‘No! One can only be strong by being weak, but weakness does not mean faithlessness, living in inferiority, or being afraid to accomplish anything because of possible pride. Being absolutely triumphant is not an ability we have—of ourselves—but is a position in the grace of God whereby we can know victory over evil, freedom from sin’s bond—age—including freedom from inordinate pride—and the grace—given power of rich accomplishment. Persecuted as we may be, we are not defeated. Rather we sensibly treat Satan and his powers as defeated enemies’.

Some may be bewildered by this answer. They may ask, ‘But isn’t this really the same as triumphalism in the matter of “getting the victory”?’ The answer is, ‘No! We are led by Christ and enabled by Christ in living victoriously, but none of this arises from ourselves. We can do all things in [through] Christ, but nothing from ourselves for that which is of ourselves is of the flesh’. We see in Romans 8:31–39 (cf. II Cor. 4:7–12) the constant stress and persecution under which the believer lives. To be victorious under such circumstances does not necessarily mean defeating one’s accusers and persecutors. One is not victorious over accusation, difficult circumstances and persecution, but, ‘in all these things we are more than conquerors’. The accusations do not disappear, we are still ‘being killed all the day long’ and ‘accounted as sheep for the slaughter’, but we are ‘more than conquerors in all these things’.

The idea of the believer himself being perfectly in control of any and every situation is not borne out by the practice of life. Whilst John (I John 2:12–14) can rightly commend the young men who have overcome the evil one

yet those young men overcome that evil one because 'greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world'. Also one has to be continually on the watch against the deceit of antichrists and false prophets. Paul's most helpful warning and advice for living in Christ's victory is, 'Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall'.

On a somewhat different note—though with the same emphasis on dependence—Paul talks about his preaching being 'in weakness and fear and much trembling', saying that 'my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom', and yet at the same time that his preaching was 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power'. There is no contradiction in being weak, that being the very moment of being strong. He can speak of 'fightings without and fears within', and yet know that this is part of all true ministry. He can speak of those having the first fruits of the Spirit at the same time experiencing convulsive suffering within, yet living in radiant hope of the glory to come.

Having said these things we are now ready to speak about the authentic use of gifts, as also of our participation in the working of signs and wonders and mighty powers—should that prove to be God's will and sovereign action at any point of His work. We need, then, to see that any action within history must be understood in the light of the nature, truth and action of the Kingdom of God. Without that context we may be tempted to think of the use of gifts and the operations of signs and wonders as tools to be used to effect certain goals of the church. We will thus be tempted to control and utilize these things, and in so doing may operate outside the will and plan of God.

Let us then look at the church as it works within the sovereignty of God, i.e. in the plan and operations of His Kingdom.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

**THE CHURCH, AND THE
KINGDOM OF GOD****KNOWING THE CHURCH
AND THE KINGDOM**

In order to place the use of gifts, signs and wonders in context we do not need to know why they come into operation any more than to know how to operate them—if indeed that is what we must do. I believe God simply moves men and women in ministry without them having to have a great apparatus or paraphernalia of theology and ability. People of God use gifts, and God works His signs and wonders at His will, and effects His purposes, and that is that!

At the same time God gives intelligent understanding of truth. Part of that truth is the realities—and even the purposes and actions—of the church and the Kingdom of God. Whilst the two are mutually inclusive, both the church and the Kingdom of God have their own identities, and these we will now endeavour to describe. What

is clear is that the church is not the Kingdom of God, nor the Kingdom of God the church.

**KNOWING THE NATURE OF
THE KINGDOM OF GOD:
AN INTRODUCTION**

Jonathan Edwards was one of the first theologians to write a history of redemption, and in doing so provided an invaluable service, for to see God's operations in both historical and theological perspective is a great asset. It brings rich understanding of God's purposes. Whilst the theme of God's great signs and wonders is no small thing, yet it is but a small part of His great reign through-out time and eternity. By rights, we ought now to under-take a broad and even detailed study of the Kingdom of God. Then, and only then, will we put signs and wonders in their true perspective. Unfortunately we will only be able to give the merest sketch of the Kingdom of God.

**The Nature of the Kingdom of God:
Its Extent and Operations**

The Kingdom Always Was

The Kingdom of God is, simply, the reign and rule of God, i.e. as it has ever been, is being, and ever will be. This means that the Kingdom is not limited within certain perimeters of time, space or personnel. Creation is God's Kingdom, and He reigns over all (Ps. 47:2). God is

sovereign over every creature and event of all time and eternity: that is His Kingdom.

This Kingdom has seen rebellion by both men and angels, so that to sight it is a divided Kingdom. Nothing, however, has changed its essential nature: God still rules. One day that rebellion—which keeps contesting the Kingdom, though vainly—will be destroyed. God’s judgements will reconcile and liberate all things into eternal unity, fulness, and harmony.

In history and through the operations of His covenants God has pursued the victory of His Kingdom. Where judgements—such as those by flood and fire—have been necessary, God has executed them. From the beginning He has formed His own people—often called ‘the people of faith’ or ‘God’s elect’—and by them has forwarded His purposes as they move towards His predestined telos (i.e. goal, end, or fulfilment).

Israel—God’s Specialized Kingdom

Israel can be called God’s specialized Kingdom within the Abrahamic Covenant. Certainly it was a Kingdom under God, but then it looked—prophetically—to the widest expression of the Kingdom under God. That Kingdom can be summed up in one statement, ‘Your God reigns!’ (Isa. 52:7). John the Baptist came proclaiming this Kingdom, and came as a prophet whose coming had been prophesied. He announced that the Kingdom was at hand, and enjoined a baptism of repentance linked with the coming of the Kingdom and the remission of sins. He spoke of a universal (though not a universalistic) forgive-ness, as also of a universal out-pouring of God’s Spirit, and the universal Kingdom—now fully coming.

Jesus and the Kingdom

Jesus also announced the Kingdom and demanded repentance and faith in the ‘gospel of the kingdom’. Having proclaimed the Kingdom throughout Israel, he went to his ordained crucifixion, and rose from the dead, thus bringing the outpouring of the Spirit—at Pentecost—and with it the pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins. This came to be known as ‘the gospel of grace’, or ‘the gospel of the kingdom’. Only the atonement could—so to speak—‘secure the kingdom’. All evil had been defeated, for all guilt had been borne by Christ. The powers of dark-ness had been crippled, and however much they may still appear to be very alive and quite powerful, their doom has been sealed, and the final judgements await them, as indeed they await unrepentant sinful man who rejects the grace of the Gospel.

The Kingdom Presently in Action

I Corinthians 15:24–28 tells us of the present action of Christ and the Father, through the operations of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s church. The powers which were denuded of their weapon of guilt against man are ruled over by Christ and are now being practically subjugated even in the face of their intractability. Christ’s teaching on the Kingdom was quite extensive, not only in the sermon on the mount and the eschatological passages, but also in the parables. The apostles also taught regarding the full coming of the Kingdom with the return of Christ, the final judgements and the establishment of the victorious Kingdom. The Book of the Revelation gives a fine descriptive and interpretative sweep of these activities.

Christ in the Action of His Kingdom

Jesus, being anointed at his baptism, began his Messianic or Kingdom action. This action we covered in the first sections of our book. When he cast out demons by the Holy Spirit the Kingdom of God came on the one exorcized (Matt. 12:28). Indeed whatever he did was an expression of the Kingdom. Matthew 4:23 covers this clearly: 'And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people'. When he delegated his disciples for such work they were to say, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'. Thus we see the actions of signs and wonders as elements of the Kingdom of God. They are God exercising His sovereignty in the way He wills, and in this there is no incongruity with His being as Creator when He thus works within His creation.

At this point it is good to observe again that the same principle by which signs and wonders were done in the Old Testament, and particularly in Israel, are repeated in Christ's ministry in Palestine, prior to his death, resurrection and ascension.

Christ's Continued Kingdom Action

Acts 1:1 said, virtually, that Luke wrote his Gospel concerning 'all that Jesus began to do and teach', and so inferred that the action in the Acts was what he continued to do and to teach, and indeed infers that he is still working. This, we should see, is the action contained in Matthew 28:20, Mark 16:20 and I Corinthians 15:24-28, as also it is the sum of the Book of the Revelation. Thus

when the apostles Stephen and Philip did signs and wonders, these were all actions of the Kingdom of God, and whenever such happen in history they are actions of the Kingdom of God.

We have no valid reason to believe that the time of signs and wonders has passed. To say that is to deny the Book of the Revelation and arrogantly to think we know the plan of God ourselves—even without reference to God! They—the signs, wonders, great powers and gifts—are no less needed today than in previous days, but saying this is not the same as saying that when we do not see signs and wonders, the Kingdom of God is not in action. Signs and wonders are only part of the Kingdom action. The primary action of the Kingdom is the dynamic proclamation of the word that transforms men and women or cuts in judgement for those who oppose it. It would be madness to say that where signs and wonders are—seemingly—absent, the word which is not necessarily at-tended by such actions, is not dynamic, or even that it is less dynamic than if signs and wonders were to attest

it. God has His own reasons for the use of signs and wonders in one season, and refraining from using them in other seasons. It is probably a mistake to say that every time the word of God was proclaimed in the Book of the Acts that signs and wonders attended it. We cannot affirm from the text that signs and wonders were always done.

The often quoted, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever', does not mean that what Jesus did in Palestine before his death he necessarily does today, and in the same manner. This would not only be to stereotype him, but it would also lock him into certain regularized action. Many of the things he did in Palestine

would be strange and out of context if they were merely repeated today, i.e. his temptation, his transfiguration and of course his crucifixion and resurrection. When we say, 'the same', we mean the same in character, although that character may manifest itself in a variety of ways. Simply to select his signs and wonders and mighty works and say he will do them today as he then did is to ignore a whole company of factors. That he may do them, and from time to time does do them is never in doubt, but that he has to do them, and the levels of the Gospel are lowered if he does not, is an argument that is untenable. History shows that God is immutable, but that He works according to His own will in the 'times and seasons' which—we must recognize—are in His own hands.

Christ's Consummated Kingdom Action

There will come a point in history when it will be said, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever'; and again, when it shall be said, 'We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign', and 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God' (Rev. 11:15, 17; 12:10).

This point in history can be classified as the total coming of the Kingdom, and so the advent of the 'age to come'. Indeed the age to come and the Kingdom of God will prove to be one and the same thing. Hence, when in the days of Christ in Palestine and then in the ministry

of the apostles and others who followed, we 'have tasted . . . of the powers of the age to come' it has simply been the action of the Kingdom of God.

KNOWING THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH OF GOD: AN EXPLANATION

The term 'church' (Greek: *ecclesia*), was taken by the early Christians to cover the Hebrew terms *edhah* (congregation, but not necessarily gathered) and *qahal* (the congregation, but generally as gathered). In Acts 7:38 Stephen spoke of Israel as 'the church [*ecclesia*] in the wilderness'. The church which we may call 'the Christian church' was born on the day of Pentecost. At first the term *ecclesia* was not given to it, but terms such as 'all who believed' and 'the company of those who believed', and it is only in the fifth chapter of the Acts that the term began to be used, and even then, sparingly.

Christ had said, 'I will build my church' (Matt. 16:18; cf. 18:17), but organized nothing in that regard, nor referred to it directly more than twice. Indirectly he used terms such as 'the flock', 'the vine', and taught of 'the family' and 'the temple', and all these terms came later to be applied firmly to the church.

We need to note that the new *ecclesia* had continuity with the old *qahal* of Israel, for at Pentecost the first members of the church were Jews, only. It also had discontinuity with the *qahal* of Israel in that the official parliament of the Jews—the Sanhedrin—officially

rejected the new teaching of Jesus, and thus delegated the 'people of the Way' to be a sect, and not the true representative *qahal* (ecclesia) of Israel.

**The Nature of the Church of God:
Its Extent and Operations**

We have said that the church and the Kingdom of God are not the one. Whilst the Father and Son head up the Kingdom (Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15; 12:10; cf. I Cor. 15:24–28), Christ alone is head of the church. The Kingdom of God is the reign of God, but the church is the living body of Christ. The church—as such—does not rule over history, but the Kingdom does. This is important to realize for we might conceive the idea that the church is to reign in this world. In fact it would logically follow that if the church itself is the Kingdom of God, then it must reign in this world, or—at least—seek to reign. In eternity the people of God do reign, but not primarily as the church but as 'a kingdom of priests'. The question then of conquering the world will not arise for the kingdom of this world will have become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ.

Of course when Peter tells us, in the light of Exodus 19:5–6, 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light', we may be tempted to think the church is indeed the very Kingdom of God, but when we remember 'the church in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38), then we recall that it was a small and even pitiful people—Israel—that God lifted up into His arms and carried

through the wilderness. It was not a triumphant nation ruling the world. Indeed it has never been that—not even in the great days of David and Solomon. No, the church is not the Kingdom of God.

Having said this we do not infer that the church is weak and helpless. Far from it, for it is its very weakness which proves to be its strength. In the long run truth will triumph and what is false will perish, leaving only the true to remain. We speak, then, of the church as a great power in its era. Every human heart that is won is a citadel of Satan that has fallen to the immense powers of love, joy and peace. Evil—in the ultimate—accomplishes nothing! Having said all that, we still say the church is not the Kingdom of God, but the proclaimer of it. In proclaiming that Kingdom it may sometimes use 'the powers of the age to come', but this is not merely a weapon in its hands to be used at its own behest. If it were the Kingdom of God it would act in this complete way. When it is said that 'the kingdom of God [is] . . . righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit', it is saying that the Kingdom has the reality and power of love, joy and peace as its very essence and all who come into this Kingdom may therefore experience those things, but not—of themselves—make them.

The Church is God's Agent for the Kingdom of God

In II Thessalonians 1:5 Paul prayed, 'that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering'. Suffering for—or in regard to—the Kingdom of God is referred to in other places (e.g. Matt. 5:10–12;

Acts 14:22), and indeed all the suffering of the church may be understood—in one way or another—to be related to the Kingdom, since it is the Gospel of the Kingdom that the church proclaims (e.g. Acts 8:5, 12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

In Luke 12:32 Jesus said to his disciples, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'. In Luke 22:28–29 he said, 'You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom'. What then do the words give and assign mean, especially in their contexts?

The verb *give* of Luke 12:32, must be related to a number of things. Firstly, there was the promise of the immediate coming of the Kingdom by John the Baptist, and the same by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, though we should note the phrase, 'is at hand', rather than 'is coming'. Secondly, the disciples had joined Jesus with a view to being in the Kingdom of God. Thirdly, Daniel 7:11–27 had spoken of the rule of the Kingdom being given primarily to 'one like a son of man', and secondly, to 'the saints of the Most High', amongst which the disciples would have reckoned themselves to be. Fourthly, the disciples had seen the Kingdom of God in action in the person of Jesus and had participated in that action—as delegated by Jesus—by proclaiming it themselves. Fifthly, it seems they were now afraid, perhaps because it did not seem to be coming to some victorious climax, and the predictions of the Cross were troubling them. Hence they needed the encouragement, 'Fear not, little flock!'

The verb *assign* of Luke 22:28–30, is clear enough.

Jesus would reign in the Kingdom of God and so would they—sitting on thrones and judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Their debate about leadership in the Kingdom had happened in that very hour. They certainly looked forward to leading positions in the Kingdom. Did they, however, see themselves as serving the Kingdom rather than ruling it?

The answer to this lies in Acts 1:2–8 where we have seen: (a) the disciples anticipated the immediate restoration of the Kingdom to Israel; (b) Jesus said that that was the Father's business, and not theirs—He would do what He would do in the right time; and (c) the Kingdom would not be limited to Israel (Palestine) but its Gospel (the witness to Jesus) would go also to Samaria and the Gentiles. This apostolic 'opening of the kingdom' to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles was no small thing. The Jews had to prepare for it by John's baptism of repentance—as though, virtually, they were an apostate people. Jesus taught the Samaritans in anticipation of the Kingdom—so much so that they called him 'the saviour of the world', and the Gentiles had to await the coming of Peter to Caesarea until a 'Gentile Pentecost' took place (Acts 10–11), such as the Jewish one had in Jerusalem (Acts 2), and the Samaritan outpouring under the ministry of Peter and John (Acts 8).

Thus, we conclude, the church is the agent of God to proclaim the Kingdom of God. That is why Paul tells the Colossians, concerning his fellow workers, 'These are . . . workers for the kingdom of God' (Col. 4:11; cf. II Thess. 1:5). The church was to proclaim the Kingdom of God in all the world. It was to do this by the power of the Spirit. *How* was it to do this? By

proclaiming the Gospel, which was at once the Gospel of salvation and the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. This can be seen clearly in the commission passages in the Gospels, and by the events of proclamation in the Book of Acts.

The Church Proclaiming the Kingdom

We have seen above that Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God by teaching and actions. Part of the proclamation was the signs and wonders, for in his case they were the word of God enacted. His actions were ‘the powers of the age to come’ (Heb. 6:5; cf. 2:3–4) operating through him. From another point they were the attestations of his ministry in word and deed. This is clear from Acts 2:22–23 and 10:36–38. This was so, also, in the ministry of the apostles, from the healing of the man at the Gate Beautiful at the temple, through to the end. Stephen and Philip were also agents of signs and wonders.

What we have to grasp, then, is that we are not masters in or of the Kingdom of God, but we are its servants. We do not innately have powers of our own, but when we preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, then all God’s power is present, so that as He wills, and by the aid of His grace, we may do ‘greater works’ than Christ did, not greater quantitatively, but greater in that the atoning work of Christ has been finished, and the Holy Spirit has come to lead us into all the truth. Christ’s works were not all signs, though his signs were all works. We may do works which are signs, but in the main we will do works which are not signs. Our ‘good works’ include our

manner of life, our morality, our conformity to Christ’s person and image, our goodness in love and concern towards all men, and the high and holy work of pro-claiming the Gospel. All of this means that the saving word of the Kingdom of God can now come fully to men and women. All of the works we do—whether signs and wonders or not—are concerned with being ‘workers for the kingdom of God’.

When we grasp the different identities of the Kingdom and the church, and also see that they relate together, then we can serve the Kingdom rather than think we are it. This will keep us in humility and we will be grateful to the Lord as we see Him ‘stretch forth his hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done in the name of his holy servant Jesus’.

Christ and His Church Proclaiming the Kingdom

What we have to keep in mind is that it is Christ’s church and not ours, and it is not an organization which we can organize and control. Likewise the Kingdom of God is under the sovereignty of the Father and His Son, and is not ours to control or direct. I Corinthians 15:24–28 shows us that Christ is directing all things, and whilst he is working with us (Matt. 20:28; Mark 16:20), he is not working for us.

Some Ideas Which Need Correction

There are ideas held and promoted today which we should seek to correct especially as we discern their wrongness. One idea is that we extend God’s Kingdom.

This is impossible for His Kingdom knows no perimeters, for it is God who reigns and He is present every-where. The Kingdom certainly may extend us, but not we, it! Again, others speak of 'bringing in the kingdom'. This is not possible. The times and seasons of the Kingdom are in the Father's hand: we cannot handle the Kingdom. Yet others have the idea that since this world belongs to God, and since He has redeemed it by Christ, then we ought to take over the world which is God's and bring it now under its true rule. This is a confused way of thinking for we live in the present evil age and not the ultimate age. It is not for us to create the ultimate age, i.e. 'the age to come', and we cannot trans-mute this age into the next for it is already an entity in its own right, and, indeed has ever been, for it is heaven itself—the eternity of God. It is certain that the coming age will come, and that will be the Kingdom of God coming fully upon us, but at the right time, not by our efforts, but by God's sovereign work in His appointed time.

If the age to come were to come fully upon this age it would utterly destroy it, but we cannot use elements of that which is to come to presently change that which now is. That is why the Day of the Lord is a day of sudden coming upon, defeating and judging, and finally eliminating this present evil age. Some brave but fool-hardy spirits would wish to take hold of the power of signs and wonders, and utilize the gifts of Christ and the Spirit to transform this present age. This is not to be so. The hour of Armageddon and the great battle has not yet come. It will come, for all evil is hastening towards the hour of its climax, but its horrible destruction

will be the eternal witness to the immutable holiness of God.

Some—reading these lines—would think this section a counsel of despair. They would say, 'This writer does not think the kingdom of God can accomplish anything in this age!'. To the contrary, the Kingdom of God accomplishes everything in this age that the LORD has planned to do. Every power and authority that is opposed to God is being put down under Christ's feet, every one of God's elect is being redeemed. His people are salt and light and a city set on a hill. The tenor of nations and the world history has been enormously changed by the coming of Christ into the world, and especially where the power of the Gospel has broken through into human affairs. The value of the true works of the church cannot be computed. The introduction of education, welfare care for the poor, the widows, orphans, homeless, persecuted, the sick and dying, are works which cannot be truly evaluated.

In the same way as salt stings raw wounds, light brings reactionary hatred from darkness, and as a city set on a hill confronts other cities which are not 'holy cities', so the Gospel has brought strife and reaction, persecution and bitterness into human affairs. Perhaps the word 'brought' is not the best word, but certainly as the law incites perverse human spirits to sin, so does the Gospel bring enormous reaction. Certainly the church has been far from pure, and has indulged itself in the battle for political power, as well as its own inner decadent struggle of a political nature.

Certainly the church has worked in the history of the world, but what we are saying is that when it enters

power struggles, when it forgets its true identity as the body of Christ, when it seeks to control nations and the wills of human beings, then it errs greatly. It is not a body which is a wonder-working body, capturing the fleshly imaginations of men and doing what Christ re-fused to do in his three temptations in the wilderness, i.e. excite interest by wonder-working, gather adherents by giving them the bread which perishes—as against the bread which gives life and endures unto eternal life—and by worshipping Satan, i.e. using his worldly methods to gain power and retain it.

When the church is weak, then it is strong, and ‘signs and wonders’ have nothing of hubris about them, nothing of assuring people that the church is strong. It has all the marks of weakness, but these marks—rightly understood—are the signs of lasting and eternal strength. Some in Israel during the ministry of our Lord looked to a mighty Messiah who would give political deliverance. Those already in places of (petty) power amongst the Jewish leaders viewed such might with apprehension. There were, nevertheless, those who recognized the true purpose of the Kingdom, and the love of God and His Messiah, and it was they who followed the Messiah, and who follow him today.

IS THIS THE AGE ONLY OF WAITING AND DOING NOTHING?

The answer to this heading question is, ‘No. It is not the age of waiting and doing nothing. It is the age of action’.

Christ has gone forth on his white charger. His sword—with which to smite the nations—is in his hand. By his church, and through his people he is presently putting down all rule and authority and power, and will shortly destroy that last enemy—death. However, what he is doing may not appear to us in bold and magnificent actions. Only faith can perceive the triumphs of Christ as he works, for we still walk by faith and not by sight—whatever.

In this age he is working with power. His power lies in the word of forgiveness, the word of purification, the word of regeneration. It is the word of love which alone can defeat and win the human heart. It is the word of compassion and mercy which releases the captives from their imprisonment and slavery. It is the word of sanctification, i.e. the word of grace—chastity which gives back to soiled man his pristine purity and makes him sing among the creatures both earthly and heavenly who worship and adore the Eternal Father, and the Messiah—Son.

It is the age of breaking down Satan’s citadels and these are primarily the hearts of men and women, young people, and little children. It is the age when His grace and love melt hard hearts and make helpless at last those strong and arrogant human beings who held out against Him. It is the age—as it was in other ages—when God moves in on human affairs and affairs of nations with signs and wonders so that believers—out of the treasury of His gifts—can love and minister to the needy as the Spirit directs. It is the time of the use of worship as His people serve Him, and of spiritual warfare against the beleaguered forces of evil.

CONCLUSION REGARDING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A CONCLUSION: GOD, HIS SOVEREIGNTY, SIGNS AND WONDERS

We see then, that we cannot control or utilize the Kingdom of God. That is the prerogative of the Father and the Son. As the church we are not the Kingdom of God, but being in it (Col. 1:13–14), and having received it because it was assigned to us, we now taste its joys (Rom. 14:17; I Cor 4:20), and proclaim it to the nations. We cannot force this Kingdom upon the world or transmute this Kingdom into this present age.

We must be careful not to seek to use the Kingdom as a counter-force to the kingdom of Satan. The doom of that kingdom was sealed at the Cross, and its death defeated in the Resurrection.

We must learn thoroughly the task that God has for us in this age. All plans and systems we have which are perfectionist, idealist, utopian and of our devising, we must steadily refuse to propagate and we must settle down to the steady practice and discipline of ‘the word and prayer’. By means of these—for they are His chosen means—He will accomplish His plan and goal, as His love constrains us, and His grace enables us. In all of this we will utilize the means He provides for the plan that He has.

‘GREAT GOD OF WONDERS’

Samuel Davies’ most beautiful and powerful hymn is a fitting introduction to our last section on the God of signs and wonders. It is fitting because it puts the correct emphasis on the nature of God as Redeemer, i.e. the God who moves out to man in his sinfulness and lostness:

Great God of Wonders! all Thy ways
Display the attributes divine;
But countless acts of pardoning grace
Beyond Thine other wonders shine:

Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?

This hymn typifies and exalts the great and surpassing grace of God. In our preoccupation with the miraculous, with the use of gifts and the operations of signs and wonders, we may miss the fact that all these things simply subserve the grace of God—that abundance of love and forgiveness which reaches out to sinful man and redeems him. The sign of Christ's death, and of his resurrection, may be left unread and even missed in our interest and obsession with the minor signs and wonders.

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF GOD'S MARVELLOUS DEEDS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We saw in I Peter 2:9–10 that the redeemed of God have become the true Israel of God, the authentic holy and priestly nation whose function and delight is to 'declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. These marvellous deeds were powerfully declared on the day of Pentecost under the gift of the Holy Spirit. The listeners said—with wonder—'we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God'.

The Action of God in His Works in and for Israel

It would be good for us to go over the many Old Testament passages relating to God's special works for Israel

—including His signs and wonders. One such passage—amongst many—is Deuteronomy 4, for it is really one of the many 'salvation histories' that Moses brings to his people. We will look now at verses 32–49:

'For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of. Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord is God; there is no other besides him. Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you; and on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved your fathers and chose their descendants after them, and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as at this day; know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you this day, that it may go well with you, and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God gives you for ever'.

Then Moses set apart three cities in the east beyond the Jordan, that the manslayer might flee there, who kills his neighbour unintentionally, without being at enmity with him in time past, and that by fleeing to one of these cities he might save his life: Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland for the Reubenites, and Ramoth in Gilead for the Gadites, and Golan

in Bashan for the Manassites.

This is the law which Moses set before the children of Israel; these are the testimonies, the statutes, and the ordinances, which Moses spoke to the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt, beyond the Jordan in the valley opposite Beth-peor, in the land of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon, whom Moses and the children of Israel defeated when they came out of Egypt. And they took possession of his land and the land of Og the king of Bashan, the two kings of the Amorites, who lived to the east beyond the Jordan; from Aroer, which is on the edge of the valley of the Arnon, as far as Mount Sirion (that is, Hermon), together with all the Arabah on the east side of the Jordan as far as the Sea of the Arabah, under the slopes of Pisgah.

In verses 33 and 34 the questions are asked, 'Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live? Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, *by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm, and by great terrors*, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?'. We see then that the purpose of signs and wonders was to reveal God as the God of redemption. To Israel He was this—the Redeemer. To Egypt and other nations He was this—the Judge.

In this passage we also see that God's action in 'trials, signs and wonders, war and great terrors' was designed to shape Israel in holiness, 'Because he loved your fathers and chose their descendants after them . . . *Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments . . . that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God gives you for ever*'. Redemption

brings obedience and holiness.

This is underlined by Moses' exhortation in Deuteronomy 6:20–25:

When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes; and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land which he swore to give to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day. And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us'.

We see then that God had a redeeming and sanctifying purpose in His acts. It was no little thing to create a holy nation—the nation which was to be the matrix of the great coming Messiah. We must conclude that signs and wonders, whilst they represented judgement to God's enemies, and comfort to His people, were also a constraint to holiness.

God Always Working

In Jeremiah 32:17–25 we have the prophet's moving prayer of anguish as he looks to God and addresses Him. He says, 'O great and mighty God whose name is the Lord of hosts, *great in counsel and mighty in deed*; whose eyes are open to all the ways of men . . . *who hast shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt*, and

to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and hast made thee a name, as at this day. Thou didst bring thy people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror . . .

Note that the prophet says, ‘to this day’, and ‘among all mankind’. He can see only a continuity of God’s acts, for whereas we have seen that three major periods of signs and wonders took place in Israel, Jeremiah sees God as working in various acts *all the time*, i.e from the time of Israel’s release from Egypt up to the moment of his prophecy. God’s ‘mighty deeds’, of course, are not confined to signs and wonders, as such.

Gideon’s Problem

In Judges 6 we have the account of God’s visitation of His servant. In verses 1 to 10 the writer really gives us a reminder of the thesis delivered by Moses so many times to his people, namely that God redeemed Israel from Egypt in a marvellous way, and gave them dominion in Canaan, but if they were to go their own way from time to time, then for this God would punish them by subjecting them to other peoples. Such had happened, even up to Gideon’s day, for Israel was oppressed by the Midianites.

In verses 11 to 18 we have the conversation of the angel and Gideon. Gideon’s pertinent question is, ‘Pray, sir, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this befallen us? And *where are all his wonderful deeds which our*

fathers recounted to us, saying, “Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?”’. Gideon then says, gloomily, ‘But now the Lord has cast us off, and given us into the hand of Midian’.

We conclude from this incident that Gideon—as other Israelites—thought God to have deserted His people *because He had ceased His redeeming and protective signs and wonders*. In the same incident we see that Gideon is called into the acts of God which He is about to do for the very purpose of liberating Israel from the Midianites. In this sense Gideon’s problem is solved and the principle of God’s sovereignty with His people is again brought for-ward.

Habakkuk’s Problem and Prayer

We recognize that the prophet Habakkuk had a problem when God told him He would send ‘a bitter and hasty nation’, i.e. the Chaldeans, to scourge Israel. Habakkuk came to see the rightness of this, and accepted it, but in chapter 3 and verse 2 he uttered what have now become famous words: ‘O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and thy work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years renew it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy’.

In this and the words following, Habakkuk was saying, ‘I know what you have done in and for Israel. This fact is now famous. You worked in wonderful and terrible ways, and now You are working again. I pray that when Your wrath is poured out You will also be

merciful, and not treat us as we deserve'. He meant 'merciful to Israel', but he was also asking God to 'Do it again!', i.e. to work in such wonderful ways as before. The prophet saw the solution of judgement in the mighty works of God for His people, for such events had previously happened throughout Israel's history.

In this regard we remember Exodus 15:11: 'Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders? Thou didst stretch out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them'. We also see the purpose as indicated in Exodus 15:13, 'Thou hast led in thy steadfast love the people whom thou hast redeemed, thou hast guided them by thy strength to thy holy abode'—i.e. to the holy land, the holy city and the holy temple.

A Conclusion on Signs and Wonders in the Old Testament

We see then that Israel was convinced that God was with them because He showed His hand by what He said and what He did. Even if at any point there were no such signs and wonders, the proof of God's work was the continuing existence, life, worship and action of His people. They expected that at the required moment, and in accordance with God's wisdom, He would act sovereignly in special deeds.

For us in our era, the truth that has come through by a study of the Old Testament is this—that God acts as He wills, within His creation, to effect the fulfilling of His plan and purpose, especially in regard to His elect. No one should consider this a curious thing.

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF GOD'S MARVELLOUS DEEDS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Moses and the Old Purpose

We have no reason to believe God's principle of doing special deeds—including signs and wonders—is any different in the New Testament from what it was in the Old Testament. We have noted that the signs of Messiah—as Jesus graciously showed them to the puzzled John the Baptist—were special, and they were Messianic acts of a marvellous nature (cf. Luke 7:18–25; cf. Isa. 25:8–9; 35:5–6; 61:1; Luke 4:18–19). Such acts had been predicted and they were fulfilled, and this gives great point to Acts 2:22 where Jesus was said to be attested through such signs and wonders (cf. Acts 10:38). Jesus claimed to be the true one of God, and was not afraid to point to his works, as being those of God.

The works themselves attested to him, but at the same time delineated Jesus of Nazareth as the new and better Moses, leading his people from bondage to freedom. The great signs and wonders and mighty works of God—whose reality was proclaimed on the day of Pentecost—had the same purpose as God's mighty deeds in Israel, i.e. to effect salvation for the elect people of God, and to be the basis and constraint for their continuing holiness. They showed that God was with them, and His continuing works would confirm this.

The New People of God, and God's Mighty Works

As Messiah's special acts and signs were predicted in the Old Testament, so were God's sovereign acts—through signs and wonders—also predicted. In Acts 2:17–21 the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32 had begun to be fulfilled, but would stretch all the way across what has been called 'the church-age', i.e. from Pentecost to Christ's Parousia.

The fulfilment of such predictions is clear in both the Acts and the Epistles. God was working with His people. As He judged Egypt in old days, now there was a judgement of Israel. The apostles could both forgive and retain the sins of their listeners. There can be no doubt that when Peter said on the day of Pentecost, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation', that he was referring to that part of Israel who rejected Christ (cf. Acts 13:40–41; 22:18–24; 28:25–27; Rom. 10:16).

This rejection by Israel of their Messiah was certainly in the minds of the new believers when they prayed the prayer of Acts 4:14–30. They wished to show those who were rejecting the Gospel that the truth was of God, and that Jesus was Messiah, so their petition was, 'And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant Jesus'. The answer to that prayer was to fill the entire assembly with the Holy Spirit and ensure the acts of signs and wonders, not only by the apostles but others such as Stephen and Philip.

Some Difference in Old Testament and New Testament Operations, Acts and Deeds

Whilst the principle of signs and wonders is the same in both testaments, yet the working out of them differs in some respects. The time of Israel was the time of God's working as He willed, for His people. The time of Messiah commenced with his works in Israel, his acts of redemption through the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension, and continues in this very age in which the Holy Spirit works. As Israel came out of Egypt into the promised land, so have the new (Messianic) people of God come out of bondage to sin and evil. Whilst in principle Israel—simply by its being—was God's priest-nation to the world (Exod. 19:5–6), yet the church is God's priestly people to the world (I Pet. 2:9–10) by virtue not only of its holiness but by its proclamation of the liberating Gospel to the world.

If Israel needed God to move in special deeds, then the church more so. If Israel was attested by God's liberation and protection then even more the church needs attestation to the word proclaimed, and to those who proclaim it.

The New Gifted People

Jesus made it clear to his disciples that they would not only do such deeds as he had done, but even greater works. We have seen that whilst Jesus did 'signs and wonders', the signs (*semeia*) were works which directed his hearers to the Kingdom, i.e. were signs to be read, and his wonders (*terata*) those actions which spoke of the

intervening power of God, i.e. that which caused people to wonder. 'Greater works', then, does not simply mean quantitatively greater, but qualitatively greater, and primarily referring to the action of the proclaimed word, and the deeds which would follow it. Signs and wonders would attest to these 'greater works', and also be part of them.

We cannot say Israel did not have gifts. Romans 9:4-5 points to the glorious gifts God gave them. We know, too, that they were a royal, prophetic and priestly people just as the new people of God have these characteristics and gifts. Yet the gifts as set out in Romans 12; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; Hebrews 2:1-4 (cf. 6:4-5); and I Peter 4:10 are unique to the church. Nor were such gifts spiritual luxuries, but necessary elements to work out the love of God within the church, and within the community to which they proclaimed the saving Gospel.

Since some of these gifts overlap with the operations of signs and wonders, i.e. 'healings' and 'miracles', there may be some grounds for believing that the church can effect signs and wonders—so to speak—at will. We would need to treat this idea with extreme caution, whilst not denying the ministry of the church in the doing of healings and miracles. In fact we have already dealt with this subject, our conclusion being that signs and wonders are exclusively done by God, though of course through His agents—His people. He may well choose—especially in new situations which we may call 'new', i.e. 'virginal' and 'missionary'—to use gifts but it is to be doubted that the church is to handle such things as an everyday operation. The very use of the gifts is under the Holy Spirit, for all operative gifts are 'manifestations of the Spirit'.

We also saw—in accordance with I Corinthians 12:4-7 that varieties of spiritual gifts are always in the context of varieties of service and varieties of working (operations). We repeat, the use of gifts is not simply an apparatus for the doing of signs and wonders. By nature of the case they would cease to be signs and wonders as such, since these represent God's judgement on the one hand, and His salvation to His elect on the other.

GOD WORKING IN SIGNS AND WONDERS DURING THE MESSIANIC AGE

We have said that all God's actions are sovereign. That is, they do not rise from man, nor are they prompted by man. The church can be confident that God will work in His own way, at His own time. Man—even believing man—cannot take over His prerogatives. The times and seasons of the Kingdom are in His hand. The history of the past 2,000 years has shown—if we read it aright—that God has never been absent from His church. Even so, if His working were assessed simply by the doing of signs and wonders then we may be excused for thinking that He was absent from the larger part of His people for many periods of its history.

We might also—mistakenly—conclude that since we have rediscovered the (so-called) supernatural gifts and are practising the use of them, even—it might appear—to effecting signs and wonders, that now all is well with the church, and the Kingdom of God can now flourish.

Whilst there is a certain element of truth in this kind of thinking, yet it is far from the absolute truth.

The Test of Suffering

If genuine signs and wonders are happening, and the use of gifts is an authentic one, then one of the proofs will be the suffering of the church. The more the Kingdom is proclaimed the more the church will suffer from its confronting of man. The manifestation of signs, wonders and the use of gifts will not make it popular— unless of course the exercise of them is false—but will bring persecution upon it. We might as well note here that although Acts often portrays a great response to the Gospel, yet very soon the church receives persecution, becomes unpopular, and sets about the task of witnessing and proclaiming without exceptional popularity or acceptance. Comparatively speaking it is always ‘the little flock’.

The Test of Fruitfulness

Where genuine signs and wonders are being performed, and gifts are being used, then true fruitfulness will be seen, not simply in numbers but in the quality of the churches. Human promotion and a fleshly use of gifts may bring temporary popularity and seeming life, but the test is whether such fruit remains and bears ‘the fruit of the Spirit’. The test is really that of genuine love since false signs and wonders can be done by those calling themselves believers (cf. Matt. 7:21–23). It is I Corinthians 13:1–3 which shows us the true fruitfulness. How

could one give all one’s goods to feed the poor, and even one’s body to be burned and yet be devoid of love, the only true fruit, and that which transcends all we may know in the pursuit, and even the exercise of the gifts? The way of love is higher than just the use of gifts for their own sake. There should be no exercise of gifts, but for love’s sake.

THE PRIMARY MATTER IS THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD OF GOD

There can be no playing of signs, wonders and gifts against the word of God, or the word of God against them. Where the word of God is faithfully proclaimed it will be in the pattern of ‘by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit’, and thus prove effective. What we need to keep in mind is that those elements which attest to the word, and which are enactments of the word, should never be operative apart from the word, but that the word itself is the dynamic utterance of God and is the very action of God Himself, no matter what media He may wish to use. Whilst we may be permitted to question dull exposition of the Bible or academic dryness in textual investigation and exegesis, yet we must not mistake such for the authentic proclamation of the word of grace. Also the actions of signs and wonders, works and deeds and the use of gifts should never be used as substitutes for the word, nor as interesting and even fascinating alternatives to it.

**ALERTNESS AS TO THE RIGHT AND
WRONG APPROACHES TO GOD AS
HE WORKS IN GREAT DEEDS,
SIGNS AND WONDERS**

The Right Way of the Use of the Signs

We must have some true principles which operate in regard to the signs. We have already seen that when Jesus said, 'Greater works than these shall you do', he was not only speaking about signs and wonders. Indeed we have noted that the term 'signs and wonders' only appears once in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 24:24; cf. Mark 13:11), and then only in a bad sense. Again it is used once in John's Gospel, and then only in a half-reproachful manner (John 4:48). Since 'works' are not all signs, then the emphasis is scarcely primarily upon signs.

What we need to note is that wonders and signs are not something the disciples do without the delegated authority of Christ. In Luke chapters 9 and 10 the disciples do healings and exorcisms, but under the command of Christ. In the Book of Acts it is Christ or the Lord who does signs and wonders (3:12, 16; 4:10; 14:3; 19:11), and whilst these are done by the hands of the apostles (Acts 2:43; 3:5-6; 14:3; 19:11), they are at the behest of the Lord. In Acts 3:12 and 14:15 the apostles protest that they do not innately have power to heal. Two other persons are directly spoken of as having the power to do signs and wonders, namely Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:6-8), but others are not named. It may well be that those who accompanied Paul—as an apostolic team—were one with Paul in the signs and

wonders that happened, but the idea of any believers or all believers doing signs and wonders does not seem to be substantiated. Possibly Mark 16:17 can be seen as meaning all believers will do signs and wonders, but the text might also be read as these things accompanying the work of the apostolic body, rather than each and every believer enacting signs and wonders. Certainly the statement, 'And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it', seems to limit the action to the proclaimers.

On the whole then it appears that signs and wonders were done under the authority of the Lord through delegated authority to the apostles (cf. II Cor. 12:12), and if others, then only such as Stephen ('full of grace and power') and Philip (the only nominated evangelist in the Book of the Acts). We might expect to see a general picture of the church doing signs and wonders. It could be thought from I Corinthians 12:27-30 that almost any-one would have almost any gift, but the statement

'God has appointed' again brings the use of gifts under authority. In I Corinthians 14:26-35 there is the use of gifts, but these must follow a certain order, and even be subject to certain authority. Whatever authentic use of gifts there is, it must be understood as the manifestation of the Spirit, and not of men.

In the matter of alertness to the true and the false, it is good to examine the state of the church in its beginnings when signs and wonders seem to have been quite prevalent. The church was first the community of love, and then the community of holiness. When the chicanery of Ananias and Sapphira threatened the pure state of love

and holiness, these two offenders were severely punished. Far from deterring genuine seekers for salvation it increased their number, and in that context the signs and wonders proceeded in an accelerated form (Acts 5:1–16). Again, in Acts 19:8–20 we see that the effect of signs and wonders was to purify the church, for all occultic practices and artefacts were destroyed when signs and wonders testified to the reality of the proclaimed word.

The Wrongness of Asking for Signs

Whilst there is a place for the asking of signs, and also of wonders, asking can often be wrong, and even evil. In John 6:26 Jesus said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves’. Had they sought him because they had seen his signs, then that would have been good. In fact they had not read the signs any more than those in Jerusalem (John 2:23) who ‘believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did’, for ‘Jesus did not trust himself to them’. It may have seemed harsh of Jesus to say to the nobleman (John 4:48) whose son was ill, ‘Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe’, but Jesus was leading him to ‘believe the word that Jesus spoke to him’, for it was the word which was primary, and ‘signs and wonders’ faith is really no true faith at all, for it will die when signs and wonders cease or are absent. Jesus told Thomas, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe’.

The Evil Seek Signs

Jesus said to those who sought signs, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah’ (Matt. 12:39). Since all Jews were covenant people they did not need signs. Many such signs and wonders had been given in bringing them, originally, to covenant. The word ‘adulterous’ is generally applied to the idolatrous in Israel, i.e. they had sought other gods—even in the face of Exodus 15:11: ‘Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?’. Since the questioners’ hearts were evil (wicked) their question was evil. Satan too, urged Jesus to do signs (Matt. 4:1–11), but Jesus simply spoke the word of God in answer, and that was sufficient.

In Mark 8:11 we read that the Pharisees came and began arguing with him ‘seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him’. This happened after he had fed the 5,000 in the desert. ‘[Jesus] sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation”’. The word ‘test’ reveals their intention. They did not believe him, not even after his feeding the 5,000. They were saying he was not of heaven, and must prove himself to be so. No wonder Jesus sighed deeply. This kind of asking for a sign is getting God to prove Himself, for such will not believe Him for His own sake, and His own being. In Matthew 16:1–4 (cf. Luke 11:16, 29) Jesus scorned them because they could not read ‘the signs of the times’ when they knew how to discern the weather from natural signs.

When Paul said, ‘For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling

block to Jews and folly to Gentiles', he was saying that Jews who heard the Gospel saw nothing in the Cross, for they wanted signs as proofs—not a cross. The Greeks desired wisdom—of their own kind—for again the Cross was foolishness. It did not make sense or wisdom to them. Paul's main point was that the Cross was what mattered, and power lay not in signs and wonders, of even the best of human wisdom, but in 'the word of the Cross', i.e. the Gospel of salvation.

Signs and Wonders That are Evil

Men and Wrong Use of Gifts and Signs

We saw that the so-called great works done by some who believed they were followers of Christ's Lordship were rejected by him as evil (Matt. 7:21–23). This was to their astonishment and shock. It appears they were the dupes of Satan and were amongst those who were evil, for 'false Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect'. These, then, are evil signs and wonders which human beings do. Doubtless such human beings are energized by Satan (Eph. 2:1–3).

Saul was one who had the gift of prophecy, so much so that it was said of him that he was amongst the prophets, yet he was a dark, remorseful man, and had a sad end. Balaam exercised extraordinary gifts of prophecy and yet is stigmatized in Scripture as a wicked man (II Pet. 2:15; Jude, all; Rev. 2:14). Even Mary who was so godly a woman, had quietly to be rebuked by Jesus when she sought to press him for a miracle in Cana of Galilee. Judas the traitor was one of those sent out by

Christ to do signs and wonders, and undoubtedly did them, but at the end Satan ruled in his heart and he became a betrayer of Jesus and committed suicide.

Regarding the gifts that can be used without love, as we saw them in I Corinthians 13:1–3, are they to be regarded as merely unfortunate, or is the use of them in fact evil, because the use was not with love?

Evil Powers and the Use of Gifts

There are signs and wonders which evil powers manifest. We saw in Revelation 13:13, 16:13 and 19:20 that various signs are performed by the false prophet and the three foul spirits, and were intended to lead human beings into oppression and delusion. In Revelation 13:2 the beast is energized by Satan: to the beast it 'gave his power and his throne and great authority'. Both man and the beast are energized by the devil.

In II Thessalonians 2:1–12 we have the Pauline picture of the last days when 'the man of lawlessness' will seek to take God's place in the temple and be worshipped as God. 'The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved'. 'By the activity' means 'according to Satan's activity', and means this 'son of perdition' (the incarnate antichrist) will be energized by Satan. 'Pretended signs and wonders' can mean 'lying signs and wonders', i.e. those which deceive, whatever their intrinsic nature may be.

We should learn that signs and wonders are not all good, can deceive—if possible—the elect, and can be done by human beings who think they are genuine.

The Signs and Wonders That are Judgements

Rejection of God's signs will bring judgement, and rejection lies in the failure to read the sign and follow its directions. Hence Jesus' criticism of those who—having seen genuine signs—came as critics of Jesus, rejecting his signs and even asking for what they would have called 'a sign from heaven', i.e. an immediate action of God before them, flashing down from heaven. There is a terrible judgement on 'lying signs and wonders' (cf. Matt. 7:21–22; cf. II Thess. 2:7–10).

However, it is in the Book of the Revelation that the signs and wonders are primarily judgements on evil. In the Gospels and the Acts, evil is defeated in some way or another by works, deeds, signs, wonders and the gifts. Demon exorcism, sickness–healing and guilt–forgiveness all weaken the false kingdom of darkness. Yet it is in the three sets of seven judgements in the seals, trumpets and bowls that God's judgements come to fruition. We observed previously that some of the judgements are linked with those signs that took place in Egypt. The acclamation in the Revelation is that God's judgements are just and righteous and true. The defeat of Satan, of the dragon–beast–false prophet, and of the Unholy City–Babylon– are all great signs and wonders.

A CONCLUSION ON SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We have suggested that the purposes of God for signs and wonders would not differ greatly in the two testaments.

The use of them primarily for the work of redemption is common to both testaments. They show God's concern for His people, and His deeds which re–deem and keep them. In both testaments the signs and wonders are done at God's initiative, not man's. In the Old Testament, signs and wonders are liberation for God's people and judgement for His enemies. This is also the case in the New Testament. It may be observed here that it is a pity that a stronger understanding of signs, wonders, works, and the use of gifts and weapons is missing in much of our preaching. As we have said, much of our preaching is anthropocentric (man–centred) and not theocentric (God–centred). People are seeking to get something from the Gospel, rather than have that mixture of awe, fear, wonder, reverence, adoration and love that comes to man as true fear of the Lord.

Whatever may be the responsibility of believing man to utilize the power God brings to him through the word and the Spirit, he must live in constant awe, never becoming familiar with that power of God, never seeking to be 'someone' when he is no one, and therefore having to become 'someone'. The judgements on those who carelessly handled holy things such as Korah, Dathan, Abiram, On, Uzzah, and Uzziah should warn us against being full of pride or of accrediting God's holy power

to ourselves. When we realize that Paul needed to be disciplined by the stake in the flesh because he could not handle—in all humility—the glories he had seen, i.e. without becoming proud, then each of us needs to live before God 'with fear and trembling', lest we become inordinately proud. The 70 disciples, in sheer joy, having discovered their power over demons, were told not to

rejoice in that they had power over demons, but that their names were written up in heaven. Salvation, the love of God, our love to Him, and our love to others are the primary thing of the New Testament, and the use of all gifts, signs and wonders must be seen in the light of this great truth and principle.

Better we follow Peter's pattern and ask, 'Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?'. That would be congruous with Paul's question, 'What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?'

POSTSCRIPT

BEYOND THE CROSS

Is the Cross Only a Beginning?

Sometimes we hear curious statements such as, 'Oh, yes, the Cross is good, but then we must go beyond the Cross', or 'On from Calvary to Pentecost'. We recognize the earnestness of those who say such things. They mean, 'One comes to salvation at the Cross, but we must not just stay there, staring at the Cross. We must get into the action, since it is for that reason God sent His Holy Spirit to His people. He wishes to empower us to get about the business of living after a godly manner, proclaiming the Gospel, having richness of prayer and worship, using the gifts, and doing signs and wonders'.

I have no problem with such a statement provided it isn't in fact-saying something else, such as, 'Oh, to be

converted is a beginning, but then only as a beginning. Being filled with the Spirit is the really significant thing, and living, moving and walking in the Spirit is what is paramount. Life in the Spirit is everything'. Of course no one should take umbrage at this kind of statement unless it means that life ought to be only Spirit-centred, and not Father-centred and Christ-centred at the same time. If it means that the Cross is a device to get us forgiven and justified but the life lived after this initial conversion experience is what matters, and that in fact life is 'over to the Holy Spirit', then again, that is not sufficient.

The Cross is for All

Everything happened in the Cross. It was there he was made sin for us (II Cor. 5:21); it was there 'the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isa. 53:6); it was there 'he bore the sin of many' (Isa. 53:12); it was there 'he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities' (Isa 53:5); it was there 'he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree' (I Pet. 2:24); it was there 'he poured out his soul to death' (Isa. 53:12); it was there 'our old humanity was crucified with him' (Rom. 6:6); it was there 'I was crucified with him' (Gal. 2:20); and it was there 'he abandoned himself up for me' (Gal. 2:20), 'the just for the unjust' (I Pet. 3:18).

Not only did all happen there, but it is from there that all goes on happening, for from that Cross continually flow love, forgiveness, cleansing, justification, sanctification, and the healing of our guilt-wounds, griefs and sorrows. Every day I depend upon that Cross for

continuing forgiveness, justification, freedom from the powers of darkness, freedom from the law's condemnation, and freedom from nagging accusation. I will need that Cross every day until I die.

The Cross in True Power of God

We know that the Spirit of God does come in power and help us to witness, but then, witness to what and to whom? We must firmly grasp the fact that the Spirit comes to reveal Christ and the Father to us (John 16:7-15). He comes to apply the work of redemption (Rom. 8:1-3; II Cor. 3:17) and effect 'the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5), so that the purification effected at the Cross can happen within me-by the Spirit. When the Father and Christ are revealed to me, when I am justified by grace, forgiven, cleansed, regenerated, and sanctified by faith, then I understand that the Cross without the Spirit would not be enough. I also understand that the Spirit leads to the Cross and so to utter redemption, and then the Spirit of God keeps me in the love and holiness wrought by that Cross. This revelation and this participation in redemption is what fires me-through love of the Spirit-to proclaim 'Christ and him crucified', and to glory in nothing but the Cross of Christ by which (or, by whom) 'I have been crucified unto the world, and the world unto me'.

All of this moves us to see that Calvary was not so much with a view to Pentecost so much as Pentecost was with a view to Calvary. By this we mean that the powers and effects of the Cross remain unapplied and unappropriated apart from the Holy Spirit.

The Cross in History

The Cross Before Time

In one sense there was the Cross before time. Some translations of Revelation 13:8 speak of 'the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world'. The book of life of the Lamb in which are written the names of the elect was certainly before time. I Peter 1:18-21 speaks in much the same vein: 'He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake'. The Cross was always there in the intention of God and ever was as though it always were.

The Cross in Time

'He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried', says the creed. It happened then-that Cross -in history. It needed only one Cross to carry the sin of the world for all time, and only one event in order to destroy the works of the devil. That event is back there in history, and humanity cannot banish it from its brain.

The Cross Now

How can the Cross be now? The fact is that Christ gathered us all up-those in the past, present and future -and bore our sins in his body on the tree. No day can be complete without the effects of the Cross. The Cross stands for forgiveness, justification, purification, sanctification and love-every day. No one can go past or be-yond that great event of the atonement. Every day we live by that Cross. The verbs which tell us we were crucified with him-as persons, as a race, as a whole humanity

-are all in the past. The 'I die daily!' of I Corinthians 15:31 has nothing to do with crucifixion. It is daily to stand in jeopardy of death because one preaches Christ crucified. In Galatians 2:20 and 6:14 Paul uses the perfect tense, i.e. tells us of that past event whose effects and fruits come to us now, and will keep coming. That is why the Cross is now!

The Cross and the Passage of History

Isaiah 53:11 says, 'He shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied'. He was the corn of wheat which fell into the ground-into the darkness-and died alone, but which now bears much fruit. He was the one who went forth weeping, bearing precious seed and who now comes rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. The fruitage of all history flows from the Cross.

In the Book of the Revelation chapter 5 it shows the seven-sealed book of history, but no one in all heaven, upon earth, and under the earth is strong enough or competent enough to break its seals. John the Seer weeps at this, but is told that one has prevailed, and he is 'the Lion of Judah'. When he looks he beholds a Lamb as it had been slain, i.e. Christ crucified. This was the one of whom Paul said to the Corinthians, 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified'.

This crucified and risen one opens the book, i.e. un-folds all history for it is in his hand by virtue of his victory of the Cross. In another way we can say the Cross determines all of history because of the victory over evil that Christ won at the Cross, and in the grave. Yes, all history flows from the Cross.

The Cross Forever in Heaven

On the great throne are the Father and the Lamb. He is the one we shall see in heaven, and throughout eternity. Out of his sacrifice we have become, and will forever be, a kingdom of priests. The Cross-so to speak-runs in our veins. We will glory now in nothing save that Cross, and then in nothing save it, for we will worship the Father of love and the Lamb who died for us.

Living in the Cross, by the Spirit

By this title we mean, 'Living in the power of the word of the Cross by the power and ministry-to us-of the Holy Spirit'. We have suggested that we never go beyond the Cross, for the power for all things lies in it. Nevertheless that power is used, applied and communicated by the Holy Spirit.

The conclusion we have tried truthfully to reach is that we never go beyond the Cross. The presence and power of the Spirit enables us to live the life which was once crucified with Christ. The magnificence of our salvation, the dynamics of forgiveness, cleansing, justification by grace and sanctification by faith so stir us that we want to tell all the world, and it is that we have been commanded to do.

To live by the Spirit is no less to live by the Father- and how glorious that is! It is the liberty of the children of God. Likewise to live in our beloved Christ, our Head, our victorious Lord whose love to us and for us is beyond human knowing, but not beyond human experience. Then-with all this-to know the freedom of the

Spirit, his daily guidance, the almost breathless expectancy of what his power will do in the realm of living-in prayer, worship, service, the use of love, the gifts which he distributes, and the powerful proclamation he effects through us-often attending it with signs and wonders- is indeed the highest and richest experience a person can live; albeit much suffering must attend it. By the Spirit we live not only in faith and love, but in living hope. We have a priceless inheritance ahead, but by faith, through the Spirit we await it with great and joyful patience.

The Cross, The Spirit, Deeds, Works, Gifts, Signs and Wonders

Through this book we have endeavoured to show that what is primary in life is the word of God, His communication to us, for 'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'.

We thus see the subsidiary ministry which works, deeds, gifts, and signs and wonders play in the overall scheme of the Gospel. Their place is important, but they must not be emphasized out of proportion. All good works and deeds are not simply the use of gifts or participation in the use of gifts. Those works cover everything we do. Provided all we do is linked with his Cross, we cannot be far away. We must continue to cling to the Head of the church-Messiah himself. In the light of his sovereignty, the Kingship of the Father and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we shall be a true people, zealous for good works.