

MIRACULOUS DEMONSTRATIONS: WATCH OUT!

By Richard Jordan

Many people suppose that miraculous demonstrations such as speaking in tongues or healing are clear proof that God is at work. So-and-so must be a man of God or he could not perform such wonderful miracles. How wrong such an idea is!

There is tremendous confusion about how to identify God's working—what He is and is not doing in the world today. What is so often overlooked is the fact that this is first of all a *dispensational* question. Only as we recognize the dispensational distinctions in God's dealings with mankind are we able to avoid confusion and disappointment on an issue such as this.

A basic lesson every Christian must learn is that it is not enough to simply be Scriptural, quoting verses for what we do; we must also be dispensational—recognizing the different programs God has had in effect at various stages of Bible history.

A dispensational question is not a question about the ability or integrity of God. Rather it is about His *intent*—what God Himself has sovereignly chosen to do. God Himself never changes (Hebrews 13:8) but His program for man *has* changed from time to time. These changes are recorded in the Word of God and thus the necessity to “rightly divide the word of truth.” All Scripture is written *for* us but not all Scripture is written *about* us.

There was a time in the program of God when His people walked “by sight”—a time when they could identify and confirm His special favor on them by looking at the circumstances of life about them. That is the way God dealt with the nation Israel. His dealings with the Body of Christ are quite different. For example, in Psalm 27:13, David says,

“I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.”

We have an expression, “Seeing is believing.” David, however, said, “Believing is seeing.” This is God's program for the nation Israel: they “believed to see.” When God gave birth to the nation Israel, they believed to see. When God gave birth to the nation at the exodus, He declared to them through Moses:

“Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.

“The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace” (Exodus 14:13,14).”

Such miraculous demonstrations were a confirmation to Israel that God was working in their midst and in their behalf. This is in absolute contrast, however, to the way Paul tells members of the Body of Christ to function. II Corinthians 5:7 says plainly:

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

As members of the Body of Christ we *cannot* look around at our circumstances and identify God’s working because of what we see. The way we know what God is doing is *by looking into His Word*. Neither our circumstances, our feelings nor our inner impressions are used as vehicles for divine revelation. There is only *one* source for identifying God’s will and that is God’s written Word.

In II Corinthians 4:16,17, Paul tells us:

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory.”

Thus the “light affliction” we now endure does not indicate that God is failing to work in our lives or that He is no longer for us. *By faith* we understand it is actually *working for us*—producing for us—“a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” It is this understanding that causes us to say with Paul,

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Paul goes on in II Corinthians 4:18 to explain that this is all possible because we “walk by faith, not by sight.”

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.”

While Israel was to look at the things they saw and thus know and identify God’s blessings on them, members of the Body of Christ are specifically told “we look *not* at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen.”ⁱ

We walk by faith, not by sight. Our circumstances are not designed to tell us about God. Rather God tells us about our circumstances. In this regard, the basic dispensational contrast between the way God dealt with the nation Israel and the way He works with the Body of Christ will be overlooked at great peril.

It is disastrous to assume that miraculous demonstrations, circumstantial evidences and seemingly supernatural things we see happening about us are proof that God is at work. How devastating have been the results of such an unscriptural and undispensational assumption.

GOD'S WORD CONCERNING COUNTERFEIT MIRACULOUS SIGNS

Beyond the dispensational question, however, is the issue of *counterfeit* miraculous signs and wonders. The following list of passages from both Israel's program and ours demonstrates that even when an event is supernatural this is no guarantee that God is involved in doing it.

DEUTERONOMY 13:1-3

"If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,
"And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying,
Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;
"Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet ..."

Notice what is here: Someone claims to have received a message directly from God and has a sign to confirm that the dream or vision is authentic. Upon checking, the sign or wonder proves to be legitimate—it actually "comes to pass." However, the vision is a departure from the Word of God to them through Moses.

What were they to do? "Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet!"

Even though a message is accompanied by miraculous demonstrations, if it violates the Word of God, forget it! Exact obedience was to be given to the Word of God to them through Moses. Deuteronomy 12:21 had just instructed them:

"What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it."

Even when signs and wonders were a part of God's program for Israel, the issue in Israel was still to be obedient to the Word of God to them. Were they interested in believing to see or simply interested in seeing? Just because there was a miraculous sign or wonder did not mean God had performed it or that they were to follow it. They were to go by the Word of God.

MATTHEW 7: 22,23

"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?
"And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

This is a solemn passage. Here are people who profess they are doing "wonderful works"—marvelous signs and wonders—in the name of the Lord. They bear His name. They prophesy, cast out devils and do miracles—all in His name. Yet they are in reality *counterfeits*—Satanic workers, *workers of iniquity*.

Obviously miraculous demonstrations are no proof that it is God at work. There is only one objective standard to go by, the written Word of God. Miracles, circumstantial evidences, fortuitous convergence of events—whatever—will not do. We must look to what is written on the pages of God’s rightly divided Word.

MATTHEW 24:24

“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

Miraculous demonstrations can be so powerfully persuasive that they would, if possible, deceive the very elect. They could deceive even *you*, dear friend. The path to such deception is focusing on circumstances—physical evidences—rather than the Word of God.

ACTS 19:13-16

“Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

“And there were seven sons of *one* Sceva, a Jew, *and* chief of the priests, which did so.

“And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

“And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

This passage would be comical if it were not so tragic. These “itinerate evangelists” came on the scene with their traveling miracle business. They erect their tent, as it were, and begin conducting services, all, of course, “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” They seem to have even assimilated the advanced position of Pauline truth, preaching the “Jesus whom Paul preacheth.”

Then the unthinkable happened. One of those to whom they ministered turned out to be the “real thing.” While these “sons of Sceva” sought to encroach upon his territory,ⁱⁱ the demon in the possessed man challenges their false claims and, as they say in the world, he beat the breeches off them “so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”

Just because someone *claims* to do something “in the name of the Lord Jesus” does not mean their claim is true.

II THESSALONIANS 2:8-10

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

“*Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

Paul here is writing about the “man of sin,” the son of perdition,” who “opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God (verse 4). It is a startling fact that the anti-Christ comes with “all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceivableness.” How is this possible? “Because they received not the love of the truth... but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (II Thessalonians 2:10,12).

The only safety from these things is the Word of God—“the love of the truth.”

REVELATION 13:13,14

And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,

“And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by *the means of* those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast ...”

Thus the great coming world ruler looked upon by God as a “beast” is going to come in the midst of great signs and wonders and miraculous demonstrations—demonstrations that are designed to *deceive* those who are not going by what God’s Word says.

GOD’S WORD CONCERNING THE PENTECOSTAL SIGNS AND WONDERS

While the above passages warn against *false* signs and “lying wonders,” what about the Apostolic and Pentecostal gifts? Are they not valid today?

God Himself performed many “signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost” (Hebrews 2:4) to confirm His Word (Mark 16:20) during the Pentecostal period of early Acts. With the emergence of the dispensation of grace, however, this “sign gift” program passed out of operation, being replaced with something far better.

God's Word concerning *His* sign program today is found in:

I CORINTHIANS 13:8-10

"Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.

"For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

"But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

The "prophecies... tongues...knowledge referred to in verse 8 are clearly the *gift* of prophecy, the *gift* of tongues, the *gift* of knowledge. Knowledge and languages themselves are never going to cease nor will there be a time when true prophecies fail to come to pass. Rather Paul is speaking about the passing away of the need for the supernatural sign gifts to communicate God's Word.

When was this to happen? "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." Frankly, this is not as difficult as some make it. If we are to complete something that is "in part" we must add more of that with which we started. For example, if we have part of an apple pie, we cannot complete it with a watermelon! The completer must be a further part of the original item.

"We know in part"—the thing being completed is knowledge. Paul is talking about the Word of God! When the completion of the mystery revelation given through Paul came, there was no more need for the sign gifts to provide further knowledge and revelation. The Word of God was then complete. Thus the gifts "vanish away, "they "cease. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these *is* charity (verse 13).

God is no longer operating the sign gift program. Rather we have His completed, written Word to which to look. It is by the written Word of God that we are made "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16,17).

Let all beware: when we encounter miraculous demonstrations, no matter how valid they seem, we should WATCH OUT!

ⁱ Hebrews 11:1 explains how we see the things which are not seen: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, *the evidence of things not seen.*"

ⁱⁱ Some may question whether Satan's house would thus "divide" against itself. Although we cannot here discuss the territorial proprieties of demonic activity, suffice it to say that Satan's kingdom is by no means one of peace and harmony. Rather he is identified as "king over all the children of pride" (Job 41:34). His kingdom is built on iniquity, greed and pride—things that never produce tranquil relations.