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## **Miracles-do the still happen?**

By William H. Bell Jr.

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Some today deny any teaching that suggests that the miraculous operations of the Spirit have ceased. On the other hand, some teach that they have ceased but use very inconclusive arguments to pinpoint the fact and time of the termination of these gifts. There are others still who properly interpret some passages regarding the end of these supernatural works of power, but who unfortunately misapply that interpretation and find themselves claiming practices which they either cannot perform or explain on any other basis than to claim such phenomena are miracles. Though not the purpose of this writing, the validity of those claims will be seriously doubtful in view of the following conclusions.

One may well ask, does the Bible teach anything definite and conclusive on the subject? In short, have miracles ceased? Can their point of terminus be determined scripturally? It is our conviction that God has clearly defined the boundaries of miraculous operations of the Spirit. The following reasons are, we believe, fully supported with Scripture. However, acceptance of truth and facts requires open-mindedness and objectivity. Feelings, void of direction from written revelation must be abandoned. Prejudices must be set aside. Preconceived opinions and traditions must yield to the staunch and invincible power of an "it is written" and a "thus saith the Lord." It is to this end that the reader is prayerfully directed.

### **Miracles Lasted Till The End Of The Age**

Miracles were to last until the completion or end of the Jewish age. To some, this statement does more than just raise a brow. However, a reinvestigation of things "most surely believed" among us serves at least two worthy purposes. One, it confirms and strengthens us if we were right the first time. Two, by contrast, it corrects and reproves our error when it is learned that previously held conclusions were wrong.

Before one rejects the affirmation above, one should at least hear the evidence. "Doth our law judge any man, before it hears him, and know what

he doeth? (Jno 7:51). Failure to observe the principle contained in this text results in stymied growth in knowledge and understanding while simultaneously incurring condemnation for pre-judging without hearing evidence.

Continuing the point above, Jesus promised that those who believed and were baptized would have signs (miracles) to accompany or follow them. (Mk. 16:17). It is grammatically impossible to misconstrue Jesus' words to mean the apostles in that text. Jesus (first person) was speaking to the apostles (second person) about those who believed (third person) the apostles' teachings. The signs would follow those who believed (third person) hence, disciples made by the apostles' preaching, (Mk. 16:16; Matt. 28:19). This is not to deny the miraculous power of the apostles for their very preaching evidenced their supernatural inspiration as noted in Mk. 16:20. The confirmation or proof of the apostles' inspiration and miraculous power was their very ability to confer or impart miraculous gifts to believers through the laying on of their hands, (Acts 6:5,6; 8:17,18; 19:6; II Tim. 1:6). It is important, however, that one take into consideration the time frame of what is taught in Mk. 16:17-18.

In addition, Mark's gospel reads, "And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word with signs following. Amen," (v.20). This is important! It says that the Lord worked with the apostles and confirmed their preaching by supernatural signs. The Lord was "with" the apostles in the "miraculous" confirmation of the word. Matthew's account of the great commission affirms the same. "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age, (Mt. 28:20, NASV). Is one to suppose that the Lord miraculously confirmed the apostles' preaching but not their teaching? Was he not "with" them in their teaching in the same way? Here, then, is the Lord promising to guide the apostles in inspiration and to confirm their words through imparting signs through them until the END OF THE AGE!

This is the Jewish age which lasted until 70 A.D.. It is the age in which the apostles were then living. How confusing it would have been for Jesus to direct the apostles to the end of the Christian age which is endless and had not yet begun when the very age in which they were living had not reached its consummation! During an earlier period of Jesus' ministry he spoke of the Jewish age as "this age," (Matt. 12:32). At the close of his ministry he prophesied that the end of the Jewish age would come after the gospel was preached for a witness unto all nations, clearly a post-Pentecost event, yet within that first-century generation, at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.

70, (Matt. 24:3,14,34; Lk. 21-22). One cannot argue that the age here is the present Christian age without having the scriptures teach living apostles, present inspiration, and continued miracles till the end of the Christian age. That would be an especially long time since the New Covenant aeon has no end, (Eph. 3:21). Therefore, the scriptures limit the termination of miracles to the end of the Jewish age in 70 A.D..

### **Miraculous Confirmation Till the Revelation or Day of Christ**

Next, the Scriptures teach that miraculous confirmation would cease at the coming or revelation of Jesus Christ. "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Cor. 2:1; 2 Thes. 1:10; 2 Tim. 1:8; Rev. 1:2,9). Second, by confirmed, the miraculous is understood.

Paul's writings make it abundantly clear that in addition to the word, (Mk.16:20), disciples also were confirmed by miraculous signs. Observe, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, IT was confirmed to us by those who heard. God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will", Heb. 2:3,4). See also Rom. 8:9; 14,16; Phil. 1:6).

Third, by revelation of Jesus Christ, the return or Parousia of Christ is meant, (1 Pet. 1:7,8). Fourth, by end, the termination of the Jewish aeon is under consideration, just as in Matt. 28:20. Fifth, that end is here seen as harmonious with the day of Christ. (See Matt. 24:3, 14, 27, 30, 34; 1 Cor. 15:24). A summary of these facts reveals that miraculous confirmation would last till the revelation or day of Jesus Christ which is equivalent in time to the end of the Jewish age. This Corinthian text is poignant in its teaching. Miraculous gifts and confirmation by signs continued till the second coming.

It is little wonder that the Pentecostals and others believe the gifts to be future. The traditional and popular viewpoint theorizes the second coming as yet future and thereby encourages neo-Pentecostal dogmatism and charismatic fanaticism. One cannot scripturally "interpret" the gifts as past and hold on to a "practical" belief of a yet-future coming. From an "interpretive" standpoint, the time of cessation coincides chronologically with the Parousia or revelation of the day of Christ. Will we speak as the Bible speaks?

### **That Which is Perfect is Come**

Third, attention is turned to a more comfortable haven that is used to teach both, the end of miraculous gifts and a denial that such was to occur at the coming of Christ! There have been numerous debates as to whether "that which is perfect" refers to Christ or to the second coming. One thing is certain, one must not place an interpretation on 1 Cor. 13:8-10 that conflicts with or contradicts Matt. 28:20 and 1 Cor. 1:6-8 above. It should be clear after examination that this passage will also concur with the truth set forth above.

There are three important contrasts that serve to illustrate the point of termination of miraculous gifts. One, "that which is in part" versus "when the perfect comes." Two, dim vision or "seeing in a mirror dimly" versus "face to face" vision. Three, the illustration to clarify these differences of childhood or infancy versus manhood or adulthood. For a clearer picture and greater clarity observe the chart below:

The coming of the perfect is the end or termination of the gifts. Equally clear is that the state of manhood, the opposite of infancy or childhood is equal to the coming of the perfect. It should be no new revelation then that "seeing face to face" is also a point marking the end of miracles and is equal to the coming of the perfect and full-grown man.

Many have objected to "that which is perfect" being a reference to the coming of Christ. It is said, "that which," literally, the thing, is neuter gender and therefore cannot be speaking of Jesus. Some have sought to answer this by showing that Jesus is referred to as "that holy thing" which was conceived in Mary's womb, (Lk. 1:35, KJV). It is interesting that those who argue that the grammatical construction and neuter gender cannot refer to Christ are only limiting it to his person rather than interpreting it more broadly to refer to the perfection of the system, covenant or resulting state of things which his coming would bring to completion. The fact that the "coming of Christ," the "day of the Lord," and the "end" are taught as the terminus of miracles is undisputable as 1 Cor. 1:7,8 shows. Therefore, quibbling over the "gender" of the term "perfect" will not deliver one from the necessary inference of the coming of Christ in this text.

Further, others see in this the completed revelation of God's word in written form as opposed to indwelling men. While it is agreed that the New Testament was fully committed to writing before the perfect arrived, the position that the "perfect" is the time of the completed written record is believed untenable. Inspiration is a miraculous manifestation in and of itself and the writing of the New Testament through the exercise of that gift was of necessity completed before the gift of inspiration ceased. John was told, "...What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches

which are in Asia...," (Rev. 1:11). Later in the vision he was told, "...Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, nations, and tongues, and kings," (Rev. 10:11). Therefore, John's inspired utterance continued beyond his written revelation as he remained or lived to see the day of Christ, (Jno. 21:22).

Inasmuch as his written revelation contained prophecies, (Rev. 1:1,19), the fulfillment of which is always a miracle, then it follows that IF THERE ARE YET PROPHECIES TO BE FULFILLED, WE ARE YET IN THE MIRACULOUS AGE! However, with the cessation of inspiration at the coming of the perfect, additional miraculously inspired writings were an utter impossibility after that time. Moreover, this fact has nothing to do with the death of an apostle or any disciple of the first century. It also explains the cessation of demon possession and the supernatural powers of evil spirits which were independent of apostles' hands or disciples' vital signs. The cessation of prophecy and demon possession was linked to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. "And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land. And it shall come to pass that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied; neither shall they wear a rough garment to deceive," (Zech. 13:2-4). The context of chapter 14:1-6 makes clear that "that day" in Zechariah 13 is the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D..

In seeking to teach our charismatic and "faith-healing" friends about the "when" of the terminus of miracles, one must bear in mind that "when the perfect comes" teaches only the fact of that terminus. It clearly tells us what would happen when the perfect came, i.e., gifts would cease. It does not state, per se, when the perfect came. Does the context of 1 Cor. 13:8-12 furnish any clues concerning "when" the perfect arrived? The choice appears to lie between the equivalents of the manhood state or the "face to face" vision. The choice that allows a necessary inference and inescapable conclusion as to when the perfect came is the parallel time of "face to face" vision. Seeing face to face is the opposite of seeing dimly through a mirror during the period of the miraculous. Face to face vision is achieved or realized in the New Jerusalem, the holy city which came down from God out of heaven, when the saints behold the Lamb on the throne of glory with the Father in the new paradise at the coming of Christ, (Rev.21:1-3; 22:3-5).



The promise of seeing face to face is equal in time to the coming of the New Jerusalem and the paradise of God. "And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bond servants shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads, (Rev.22:4).

Therefore, seeing face to face which is equal to the coming of the perfect in the Corinthian text, is equal in time to "seeing His face" in the New Jerusalem at the second coming. It is the full open-faced, un-mirrored revelation or unveiling of God's glory in Christ, a glory that was ready to be (about to be) revealed in the apostles' own generation, (1 Pet.1:5,7-8; Rev.1:1-3). Again, the search for the time of the end of miracles points repeatedly in the same direction - past and historical - to the same time, the coming of Christ at the end of the Jewish age in 70 A.D..

### **Redemption of the Purchased Possession**

Fourth, one is challenged by the word of God to accept that miracles would last until the "redemption of the purchased possession." "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory, (Eph. 1:13,14). Paul speaks of the laying on of hands to impart miraculous gifts to the Ephesians at their reception of the gospel, (Acts 19:1-6; Mk. 16:17-18). Of this miraculous endowment he says three things: One, they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Two, that sealing is referred to as the earnest of the Spirit. Three, the earnest of the Spirit (miraculous gifts) would continue until the completed redemption of the purchased possession or the receiving of the inheritance.

The words sealed and earnest are both terms which indicated miraculous operations of the Spirit. The reader is urged to consider some excellent comments on these terms in *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, pages 173-182 by Franklin Camp. Thayer's lexicon states that earnest means "money which in purchases is given as a pledge that the full amount will subsequently be paid," (p.75). It seems reasonable, then, that God gave miraculous gifts as a pledge until the redemption was completed or the inheritance was received. If that redemption were "completed" at the cross or on the day of Pentecost, then miraculous gifts were a useless commodity to the church as it relates to the same. Further proof that the redemption was not complete was the "futurity" of the inheritance which would be received at the second coming, (Matt. 25:34; Eph. 1:13,14; Heb. 9:15).

From these scriptures, and the fact that the church could not enter upon the fullness of the inheritance in a state of infancy or immaturity, (Gal. 4:1,2),

then it follows that the inheritance was received upon the church's attainment of full-grown status which we are clearly told was accomplished through the miraculous, (1 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:13-14). Why give the gifts to accomplish spiritual manhood and completed redemption/inheritance if the church was born full-grown on the day of Pentecost? Completed redemption/inheritance are joined to the cessation of miraculous gifts. "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." A progressively received inheritance (see Heb. 28 and note the present participle "receiving") does not deny the efficacy or negate the power of God through the death of Christ, but rather it demonstrates God's own purpose and time in accomplishing the counsel of His own will.

The purchased possession is the church. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood," (Acts 20:28). The completion of that redemption was clearly future at the time of the writing of Ephesians, about A.D. 58, though not removed from that first-century generation. When was that redemption completed? This is vital to an understanding of when those gifts would cease. Paul writes, "And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption, (Eph. 4:30). This day is none other than the revelation or day of Christ as taught in 1 Corinthians 1:7-8.

When did this redemption occur? Luke writes, "And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh...Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled," (Lk. 21:27-32). There again is the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven. The apostles are admonished to look up and lift up their heads when they recognized the events transpiring in fulfillment of the Lord's words for then *their redemption would be at hand or near*. All of those things, of which redemption was included would be fulfilled in that first-century generation. The reference is clearly the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem. "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh...For these be the days of vengeance that all things which are written may be fulfilled," (Lk. 21:20-22). Therefore, the redemption of the purchased possession was completed in A.D. 70, at the fall of Jerusalem which corresponds in time to the end of the Jewish age and coming or Parousia of Christ. This was the "day of redemption" and the termination of the "earnest" or miraculous gifts.

### **The Unity of the Faith**

Fifth, Paul states that the gift of inspiration to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers would continue till "we all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect (full-grown) man, (Eph. 4:11-14). It has been demonstrated that the full-grown man (perfect) state is equivalent in meaning and time to "when that which is perfect is come," and the "face to face" presence of Christ, (1 Cor. 13:8-12; Rev. 22:4). Things equal to the same thing are equal to one another. Therefore the "unity of the faith" equals to the "face to face" presence in the revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of the Jewish age.

### **According to the Days of Egypt**

Finally, God through the prophet Micah promises that marvelous things (miraculous gifts) would last for a period of about 40 years. "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvelous things," (Mic. 7:15). The Israelites wandered in their pilgrimage from Egypt and quest for the promise land for a period of about 40 years, (Heb. 3:17).

God says according to those days he would show marvelous things. It is argued by Pusey (see Barnes Commentary on Micah) and by Guy N. Woods (see the Woods-Franklin Debate, p. 156) that the "marvelous things" here are miraculous gifts and equate with Joel's prophecy concerning the out-pouring of the Spirit in the last days. That period, if reckoned from Pentecost till 70 A.D. is about 40 years. On the other hand, if it incorporates the ministry of Christ and the miracles he performed in the last days, (Heb. 1:2), then it yields a more precise calculation of 40 years. In either case, the reference is too clear a matter to be trifled with for the end of the Jewish age, the line of demarcation in the close of national Israel's history is the Seer's reference.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it has been the purpose of this writing to allow the Bible to speak on the cessation of miraculous gifts. God has given definite scriptural boundaries for the end of miracles. They may not coincide with commonly held views. Nevertheless, the harmony and consistency of all the above passages undeniably point in one direction - past history, to one time - the end of the Jewish age and coming of Christ in A.D. 70. Not once in scripture is the death of an apostle or disciple mentioned as a point of termination though this is a commonly held tradition among many brethren. The completion of the written record of the New Testament is also questioned and shown to be inconclusive as a point of termination. The writing of the new testament of necessity preceded the end of miraculous inspiration and the fulfillment of the



day of redemption which it prophesied. In addition, the reason there were no inspired books, apostles, teachers, pastors, prophets, evangelists or otherwise after the end of the Jewish age is that none had any divine authority to continue prophesying or inspired utterance after vision and prophecy were sealed up, (Dan. 9:24; Zech. 13:2-4).

From that point on even to this very day, apostolic authority and all other authority rests in the word which stands completed and fulfilled. Neither an apostle nor even an angel from heaven could add anything to, or take anything away from, to alter the perfect law of liberty which had been revealed before 70 A.D., (Gal. 1:8,9). Once this message was confirmed in the fulfillment of all things further inspiration and confirmation was no more needed then than it is needed today! Were the apostle John and other disciples of the miraculous period any less equipped or competent to live in a post-miraculous age than the generations of their succeeding counterparts? Did they not experience the state of the perfect just as we are today? To argue for inspired apostles after the fulfilled, confirmed arrival of the "perfect" is to deny that very confirmation and perfection. Lastly, the end of the age, the revelation or day of Christ, the full-grown man, the coming of the perfect, seeing "face to face," the redemption of the purchased possession, receiving the inheritance, and the unity of the faith are all equivalents in time and meaning having occurred in 70 A.D. with the fall of Jerusalem. The Bible makes abundantly clear that this is the time of the end or cessation of miracles. (WHB)

To put an addendum to this article, I would mention that the 'age of miracles' and the 'gift of miracles' are what are spoken of here and not miracles, in and of themselves. God can work His miracles any where and at any time. However, we see no one today with the 'gift' of miracles.

It is a historical fact that gifts of miracles ceased in the first century, there being no continuation of them in recorded history. As the miracles were to show Israel that God was working in the Gospel, and as a sign of judgment upon them (1Cor. 14:22 cf Isaiah 28:11) when the Jewish state went out of existence circa 70AD, so did tongue speaking, etc. (bob)