

MIRACLE AND SCIENCE

BIBLE MIRACLES EXAMINED BY THE
METHODS, RULES AND
TESTS OF THE
SCIENCE OF JURISPRUDENCE
AS ADMINISTERED TO-
DAY IN COURTS
OF JUSTICE

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CHAPTER VIII

CESSATION OF MIRACLES—WHY

"God also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders, and divers miracles." *Hebrews 2:4.*

WE are examining the record, by rules of jurisprudence, to ascertain what the evidence establishes generally in regard to miracles. In the presence of clear knowledge of *woes* that, to human view, God's miracles could, and only his miracles could, relieve, it is but natural that the question should arise, as it so constantly does in burdened souls, Why are not open, public, and undoubted miracles, that could and would relieve such woes, wrought in our day or since the decease of the apostles and immediate disciples of Christ, as were wrought during Christ's earthly ministry or during the lives of the apostles? Does the record and evidence furnish any answer to that question? Confining our investigation more particularly to those miracles, we observe that the conception of miracle as disclosed by the Bible is a wonderful, supernatural, and superhuman transaction wrought pursuant to the special fiat of Deity. Intelligent purpose inheres in the

fiat. Hence function in each miracle is determined by the purpose for which it is wrought.

There is no other rule or standard than the will and purpose of God, for determining function of miracle in any case. Only Infinite Wisdom determines when and why a miracle shall be wrought. We have seen in previous pages that the miracles wrought by Christ had their functions in, and were wrought constantly and expressly to attest, the person of Christ, his divinity, revelation and doctrine and gospel of salvation. Also, we have seen that, in the judgment of right reason, and to human view, the evidential force and effect of those miracles were indispensable in establishing those truths in regard to Christ and his Church and the Christian religion; and that without those miracles Christ's mission, religion, and church would not have survived his death on the cross. The apostles also knew the supreme importance of that miracle evidence with a vividness we probably cannot or do not often apprehend. The apostles not only knew with distinct realization the indispensableness of the miracles in so attesting Christ and his mission during his earthly ministry, but more profoundly, if possible, they knew the indispensableness of miracles to be wrought to attest the apostles and im-

mediate disciples of Christ, in taking up and promulgating Christianity, establishing the Church of Christ, executing the great commission.

The apostles were arrested for teaching a fundamental fact of Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus. Although not then punished, they were "straitly" commanded that they speak thenceforth to no man the gospel message of Jesus. Being let go, they reported to the company of the apostles and disciples their experience at the hands of the Sanhedrin. The record is, the company of apostles and disciples lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and prayed earnestly: "Grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, [how?] by stretching forth thy hand to heal: and that signs and wonders may be done by the Name of thy holy child Jesus." That prayer was then and there granted (Acts 4:29, 30-31). The record of the fulfilment of that answer to that prayer of the disciples is: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people. . . . And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:12-24). Paul and Barnabas carrying the mission to the pagans in Asia Minor at Iconium spoke "boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony [as

Barnabas with the other apostles had, as just stated, prayed for] unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3).

At Ephesus, another pagan city, Paul baptized men, "and when Paul had laid his hand upon them the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. . . . And God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul" (Acts 19:6, 11). In vindicating his ministry as an apostle of Christ to the Corinthians, Paul insisted on the miracles he wrought among them as the indubitable proof of his apostolic office. "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12). That exhibition of power is evidently what Paul designates in his First Epistle to the Corinthians (2:1-5) that in "declaring" unto them the "testimony of God" his preaching was not with "enticing words of man's wisdom" (as at Athens on Mars' hill), "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." "The power of God" manifested in miracles was "testimony of God." Through Paul that testimony was communicated to the Corinthians.

Paul writing to the Roman Christians glories in the fact that he had been permitted to be a minister of Christ Jesus unto the Gentiles:

“I have therefore my glorying in Christ Jesus in things pertaining to God. For I will not dare to speak of any things, save those which Christ wrought through me, for the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, in the *power* of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15: 17-20, Am. Rev.).

The Evangelist Mark records the substance and result in describing the work of the apostles and immediate disciples of Christ in executing the great commission after his ascension. “And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following” (Mark 16: 20). More literally scholars say, “Through the accompanying signs.”¹ Reviewing the work of the apostles in the Epistle to the Hebrews, the writer exalts the “great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him: God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, *according to his own will*” (Heb. 2: 3, 4).

¹ Morrison, Com. on Mark, p. 463.

“NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS THOU WILT”

Does not this last clause, miracles wrought according to God's omniscient judgment and will, furnish us the key which opens to us that which answers the question at the head of this chapter? The Bible record shows, and it is the consensus of believers, that miracles are wrought by God when there is in his judgment adequate cause and occasion for them. God does not work them except for great cause and for religious purposes. They belong to the history of redemption; and there is no genuine miracle without an adequate occasion for it, in God's redemptive revelation of himself. Miracles are wrought only in accordance with the judgment as well as will of the All-wise. Because the record shows that in almost all the miracles wrought by Christ they were beneficent in relieving human distress, the conclusion may have been, or is often reached, that benefit to the distressed is (if the expression may be used) the normal function of God's miracles, and that when wrought upon persons the function is beneficent to the individual.

But a brief consideration of the record will show the error of such conclusion. If we assume, as a liberal basis of the rate of peopling the earth in obedience to the command to multiply and replenish

it, i.e. that the antediluvians doubled in population once in fifty years on the average — a basis which, in view of the great age they attained and brought forth children, seems not unfair — the persons destroyed by the flood in Noah's time must have been more than a hundred million. If we consider other cases — like the destruction of the first-born of 7,000,000 in Egypt when hardly less than 1,000,000 were destroyed, or the destruction of Sennacherib's host of 185,000, and other recorded instances — we shall see that miracles that have operated on persons to relieve distress are but a fraction in comparison with all persons upon whose lives miracles have operated disastrously and destructively.

THE MASTER'S LESSON AT NAZARETH

The record discloses plainly that the existence of sufferings, misery, or woe of human beings cannot be truly averred as the immediate direct cause of the Bible miracles. Is not this the plain, direct teaching and lesson of the Master taught to his townspeople at Nazareth, on a Sabbath in the early part of his ministry? The record is, after Jesus had taught, wrought miracles at Capernaum and elsewhere, and, in modern speech, had become famous:

“He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, as his custom was, into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it is written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4: 16-19).

Having read that prophecy of Isaiah, Christ announced to his townspeople that he was Messiah — the One described in the prophecy as anointed, that in his person that Scripture he had just read was fulfilled. Miracle was an especial part of that sermon. Whatever else was considered by the Master in the gracious discourse he then gave, has not been preserved; but what he taught on the subject of miracle, and that alone, is preserved.

Recognizing the fact that the fame of miracles he had wrought at Capernaum had preceded him at Nazareth, the Master voiced the expectation or hope of his hearers that miracles of healing and beneficence such as he had wrought at Capernaum might be performed there at Nazareth. That hope

or desire was, however, dealt with by the Master as a means of teaching his lesson on the subject we are considering in this chapter.

FOREIGNER FED IN A FAMINE — WHY

Recognizing the existence of misery, want, and disease at indicated dates in the history of Israel, Jesus said:

“But of a truth [verily] I say unto you, There were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and unto none of them was Elijah sent, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.”

This miracle was wrought at the time Ahab and his Queen, Jezebel, worshiping Baal, had made Baal worship the state religion of Israel. Ahab and Jezebel were persecuting with relentless hate and death all the godly Israelites. There were 7,000 of such godly adherents to Jehovah (1 Kings 19:18). Christ's lesson emphasizes the fact that there were many widows and doubtless many among the 7,000 godly people, yet God's miracle supplying food through the famine was wrought not for any of that godly 7,000 or any Israelite widow, but for a foreigner in Sidon, outside of Israel. We must re-

member that the record shows that God does not work a miracle except for adequate cause and for a religious purpose in God's redemptive revelation of himself.

Applying these principles to the miracle, we see that it was wrought outside of Israel, in Sidon or Zidon, among a pagan people, whose king was Ethbaal, and Baal was the god of Sidon. Jezebel was the daughter of that king Ethbaal, and had induced Ahab to make Baal the national god of Israel, and to the utmost to dethrone Jehovah, and destroy faith in him and in his worship in Israel even to the extent of destroying every adherent of Jehovah. The miracle — the testimony of God — was wrought and given to Sidon, the pagan city which worshiped the false god that Jezebel was cruelly forcing upon Israel. The miracle was Jehovah's revelation of himself at the home and nation from which Jezebel had brought Baal and Baal worship to Israel to supplant Jehovah.

ANOTHER FOREIGNER, NAAMAN

Doubtless after Jehovah, by another miracle at Carmel, had vindicated his Name, and Elijah as his prophet, the 7,000 devout Israelites were increased in numbers, and among them were lepers; yet the

Master told his audience at Nazareth: "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

Again the lesson of the Master was, Jehovah passed by all the sufferers among the chosen people, the Israelites, and wrought the miracle of healing leprosy upon one only, and he a foreigner, a Syrian. The miracle carried the Name and knowledge of Jehovah effectively into a pagan city by the General and War Lord of its Ruler. That the miracle wrought belief in Naaman that Jehovah was the only true God, is evident in the pardon he asks for even appearing to join with his King in worshipping Rimmon, the god of Syria and of the temple of Damascus (2 Kings 5:18).

Christ was responding to the desire of the Nazarenes that he should perform a miracle then and there, and he answered responsively by stating two miracles wrought by Jehovah, emphasizing the significant fact in each case, that relief from suffering of human beings was not the essential function or purpose of miracle. That was the judgment and that was the will of Jehovah, and that was the answer of the Master to the Nazarenes, and his lesson to all, at least in regard to such miracles as the Mas-

ter was working at Capernaum, and in his earthly ministry, and such as his apostles and immediate disciples wrought after his ascension — during the apostolic age — to attest Christ, his mission and doctrine and his salvation. Why then did miracles, such as wrought by Christ and his apostles, cease after the decease of those servants and ministers of Christ, the termination of the apostolic age? At that time the Church of Christ had been established, built on Christ its Founder and Foundation. The Gates of Hell had not prevailed against it. The religion of Christ had been also established, for it has ever since gone on, sometimes sadly, but never dying, but moving on conquering and to conquer, its triumphs constituting justly the wonder of the world.

In accomplishing those great achievements, God's gracious ministration of miracles, as his indubitable testimony in authenticating Jesus as Christ, and his divinity and doctrine and mission of salvation, not only wrought as the power of God, but, as we have seen in previous pages, was indispensable in the establishment of those transcendent achievements in religion and the welfare of the race of mankind. But God's gracious ministration of miracles having wrought with the teaching and doc-

trine of the Master and secured those transcendent achievements, we do not see any reason against — but many, perhaps all, reasons for — the proposition, that that gracious ministration of miracles by Jehovah should be embraced in the list of the transcendent works of Jehovah that are within the doctrine heretofore fully stated *ἄπαξ*, “once for all.”

We do not understand that the teaching of the Master impairs the verity of Jehovah's promise in the second command of the decalogue, that he will show “loving kindness unto thousands of them [generations] that love him and keep his commandments” (Ex. 20:6, Am. Rev.), a promise and providence that is private, pervasive, silent, effective, and being constantly fulfilled. Nor does the Master's lesson exclude the conclusion that Jehovah will (if ever, in his judgment, cause and occasion exist) publicly work miracles again, such as were wrought by Christ and the apostles in that age.