

The Signs of the **KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

by K. R. Blades

One of the striking features of our Lord's earthly ministry, as recorded in the Gospel accounts, is the working of wonders and miracles. It seems like in just about every chapter of Matthew through John that the Lord is healing physical ailments and casting out demons, and performing other mighty works. The details of dozens of His miracles are recorded for us, and multitudes more are declared as having been done. And the Lord Himself was not alone in this. He also gave the power to do so to His 12 apostles, and to at least 70 others with Him. (Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:1,9) Obviously, without any question the working of miracles and wonders held a prominent place in the ministry of the Lord and those with Him when He was here on this earth.

This profuse working of miracles, though, was not without reason. They were not performed by our Lord and those with Him simply as spectacular events designed only to arouse amazement in people. But rather, as they are repeatedly identified to be in the Gospel accounts, they particularly functioned as *signs*. They, therefore, *signified* something. A *sign* serves to confirm something; validate something; indicate the presence of something; or, be a token or proof of the reality of something. Accordingly, as *signs* the working of miracles functioned as confirmations for the things which the Lord and His 12 apostles were preaching. Hence, they validated the message God was proclaiming at that time, and served as tokens or proofs of the reality of what that message declared to the people.

With this being the case, in order to understand and appreciate the miracles of the Lord's earthly ministry, along with that of the 12 and others, it is essential that the program that God was working out at that time be understood first.

The Gospel accounts record the outworking of God's program and dealings with the nation of Israel. In accordance with the covenant God made with Abraham when He separated him unto Himself, God's plan and purpose with the nation of Israel is that of establishing them as His "*great nation*" on this earth. (Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 19:5-6) With them as "*a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation*" in the land given to them, God's kingdom and dominion will be established on this earth, and through them in that kingdom all the families of the earth will be blessed. This is what Isaiah described as he looked forward to the fulfillment of God's purpose with Israel.

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people:"(Isaiah 2:2-4a)

God's covenanted purpose with Israel is to establish His kingdom on the earth in and through them. His dominion on this earth, along with the administration of His ways and His paths, will be provided for through them. The will of heaven will reign and rule on this earth in Israel's covenanted kingdom.

Not only will righteousness rule and God's will be done on this earth in Israel's kingdom, but the curse will also be removed and the corruption of it will be no more. As Isaiah also declared...

"And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken *it*. (Isaiah 25:7-8)

When the Lord was born into this world, He came in accordance with the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. He came as Israel's "*horn of salvation*" and Redeemer, to provide for the establishment of this long-awaited and covenanted kingdom of God. Just as the angel Gabriel said to Mary...

"And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and THE LORD GOD SHALL GIVE UNTO HIM THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER DAVID: AND HE SHALL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOR EVER; AND OF HIS KINGDOM THERE SHALL BE NO END." (Luke 1:31-33)

John the Baptist's father also declared this when he blessed God, saying....

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy *promised* to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life." (Luke 1:68-75)

Obviously, when the Lord was here God's program and dealings with Israel was not only still in effect, but that program was entering the stage for its fulfillment. Because of this, the "*gospel of the kingdom*" was heralded to the nation. The good news of Israel's covenanted kingdom was proclaimed to her to be "*at hand*" by John the Baptist, the Lord, and His 12 apostles. (cp. Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17; 10:1-7; Mk. 1:14-15)

Along with this, as in the Sermon on the mount, the Lord declared beatitudes in connection with Israel's kingdom and taught the issue of being "*least*" and "*great*" in it. (Matt. 5:1ff) He also told the apostles of their positions of rulership and authority in it. (Matt. 19:28) Israel's covenanted kingdom truly was "*at hand*," just as was being

proclaimed. But the words of the "*gospel of the kingdom*" were NOT the only testifier to this fact. The *signs of the kingdom* were also being manifested among the people by the Lord and by His apostles. Signs were being given which confirmed the time "*at hand*" and which signified to the people the reality of the kingdom's nearness. These signs were foretastes of the blessings of that covenanted kingdom. These signs were the miracles of the Lord and His apostles.

In Luke 8:1, it is recorded how that the Lord, as He went throughout every city and village, He was....

"PREACHING AND SHEWING THE GLAD TIDINGS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD:"

It was by the miracles and wonders that He did that He *shewed the glad tidings of the kingdom*. For those miracles and wonders were specific ones which were foretastes of the blessings which that kingdom had in store.

Of all the marvelous blessings of Israel's kingdom, two particular ones are presented in the prophets as the hallmark blessings of the kingdom. They are the removal of physical ailments and infirmities, and the removal of the unclean spirits from the land. This is declared, for example, in Isaiah and Zechariah.

"Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them *that are of a fearful heart*, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come *with vengeance, even God with a recompense*; he will come and save you. THEN THE EYES OF THE BLIND SHALL BE OPENED, AND THE EARS OF THE DEAF SHALL BE UNSTOPPED. THEN SHALL THE LAME MAN LEAP AS AN HART, AND THE TONGUE OF THE DUMB SING:...THEY SHALL OBTAIN JOY AND GLADNESS, AND SORROW AND SIGHING SHALL FLEE AWAY." (Isa. 35:3-10)

"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." (Zech. 13:2)

In accordance with the "*kingdom of heaven being at hand*," the Lord and His apostles repeatedly manifested these two *hallmark signs of the kingdom* in their ministry to Israel. They "*shewed the glad tidings of the kingdom of God*" by these miracles as they preached that it was "*at hand*," just as the Gospels testify.

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM, AND HEALING ALL MANNER OF SICKNESS AND ALL MANNER OF DISEASE AMONG THE PEOPLE...And they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them." (Matt. 4:23-24)

"And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, HE GAVE THEM POWER AGAINST UNCLEAN SPIRITS, TO CAST THEM OUT, AND TO

HEAL ALL MANNER OF SICKNESS AND ALL MANNER OF DISEASE...These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather TO THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. AND AS YE GO, PREACH, SAYING, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND. HEAL THE SICK, CLEANSE THE LEPERS, RAISE THE DEAD, CAST OUT DEVILS: freely ye have received, freely give." (Matt. 10:1-8)

"But if I CAST OUT DEVILS by the Spirit of God, THEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COME UNTO YOU." (Matt. 12:28)

"And HEAL THE SICK THAT ARE THEREIN, and say unto them, THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COME NIGH UNTO YOU." (Luke 10:9)

The miracles of physical healings and casting out of demons truly functioned as signs of the kingdom to the nation of Israel. Through their manifestation they signified that their long-awaited "*kingdom of heaven*" really was "*at hand*." They functioned as the "*signs of the times*," just as the Lord pointed out to the Pharisees. (Matt. 16:1-3) They confirmed to the nation the reality of the fact that "*the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand*."

As God's program and dealings with Israel continued on following the Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension back to the Father, even more signs were given to the nation. In accordance with what the prophet Joel had foretold concerning the arrival of Israel's "*last days*," the baptism with the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost produced the initial signs that signified that those days had now arrived upon the nation. (Acts 2:1-21) Also in connection with this, the Lord, before His ascension, had described the further signs which would occur as Israel's program entered those prophesied "*last days*." (cp. Mark 16:15-20)

When the Lord Jesus Christ unexpectedly came back from heaven and raised up Saul (Paul), as recorded in Acts 9, He commissioned him as a brand new apostle. He did so in view of the fact that He was ushering in a new and unprophesied dispensation, or program -- a "*dispensation of the grace of God to us Gentiles*." (Eph. 3:1-12)

In so doing, as the apostle Paul teaches in Romans 9-11, God has temporarily set aside His covenanted program and dealings with the nation of Israel. He has suspended His dealings with them, and the "*fulness*" of their program is in abeyance until AFTER this present dispensation of Gentile grace is concluded.

The ushering in of this present *dispensation of Gentile grace* by God, and the attending "*fall*" and "*diminishing*" of Israel, was also accompanied by confirming signs. God gave undeniable proof of the new ministry and message of the apostle Paul through "*mighty signs and wonders*." He confirmed the reality of His having turned to the Gentiles, just as Paul stated, for example in Romans 15.

"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, BECAUSE OF THE GRACE THAT IS GIVEN UNTO ME OF GOD, THAT I SHOULD BE THE MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES, MINISTERING THE GOSPEL OF GOD,

THAT THE OFFERING UP OF THE GENTILES MIGHT BE ACCEPTABLE, BEING SANCTIFIED BY THE HOLY GHOST. I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, TO MAKE THE GENTILES OBEDIENT, BY WORD AND DEED, THROUGH MIGHTY SIGNS AND WONDERS, BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD;" (vs.15-19)

At the same time, God also gave proof to Israel of her "*fall*," and "*provoked her to jealousy*." During her time of "*diminishing*" God gave her signs to the Gentiles. And as the apostle Paul taught concerning one of those signs in particular -- tongues -- it served as a sign of God's displeasure with her.

"In the law it is written, With *men of other tongues and other lips* will I speak to this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not:" (I Cor. 14:21-22)

With God having set Israel and her program aside, the establishment of her covenanted "*kingdom of heaven*" on this earth is NOT now "*at hand*." But rather, God is NOW working out "*the mystery of Christ*" with us Gentiles in accordance with His *now-made-known-plan* for the reconciliation of the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, just as God has the apostle Paul teach us in his epistles.

This being the case, therefore, God is not now in the business of manifesting the signs of the kingdom. His program with Israel is NOT the program He is now administering, and her "*diminishing*" has long since been fully accomplished. (Acts 28:16-28) The signs of the kingdom, though, will yet be manifested again when God resumes His covenanted program and dealings with Israel, after this present dispensation is concluded.

There is one, though, whose business it is during this dispensation of grace to produce seducing signs. As the apostle Paul teaches us, the activities of Satan's policy of evil against the body of Christ involves the use of "*seducing spirits*." (e.g. II Cor. 11:1-15; I Tim. 4:1-16) The object and design of these "*seducing spirits*" is that especially of beguiling Christians into doctrinal error and contrariness to what God is doing in this present dispensation. Through the use of seducing signs credence is given to all sorts of "*winds of doctrine*," especially those which teach Christians that God's program with Israel is the program we are to follow today. (Col. 2:1-3:4; I Tim. 4:1-5)

It is essential, therefore, in view of Satan's policy of evil for Christians to understand the place of miracles, wonders and signs in the outworking of God's plan and purpose. In connection with God's program and dealings with Israel, the *signs of the kingdom* were naturally manifested as the "*kingdom of heaven*" was "*at hand*." But with the setting aside of Israel and her program, God ceased performing those signs and He functions today in accordance with the new dispensation He is administering.