

## GOD'S KINGDOM AND THE MIRACULOUS

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*Clusters of miracles are not the norm in history. They occur at strategic times in history. Miracles happen with special representatives of God in connection with the nearness of the kingdom of God on earth. While the kingdom will become near again in the coming Tribulation Period, this church age is not characterized by the nearness of the kingdom and thus miracles are not the norm for this age.*

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### Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship between the kingdom of God and miracles or what the Bible often calls “signs and wonders.” Miracles do not occur in a vacuum. They happen for a reason and in connection with other purposes of God. In fact, a correct understanding of miracles must come within a proper understanding of the broader and primary theme of Scripture—the kingdom of God.

Both sides of the miracles debate, whether continuationist or cessationist, acknowledge the importance of the kingdom to their views. Modern promoters of signs and wonders base their view on a certain perspective of the kingdom. For example, John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard Movement, also known as the Signs and Wonders Movement, explicitly adopted George Eldon Ladd’s “already/not yet” view of the kingdom as the “theological basis” for his continuationist views. Ladd taught that the Davidic/Messianic kingdom of Jesus was inaugurated with Jesus’ first coming and that Jesus is currently reigning from David’s throne.<sup>1</sup> Using Ladd’s ideas, Wimber concluded that if the Davidic kingdom of Jesus is in operation

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<sup>1</sup> See George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 336–37. Ladd says, “Jesus has now been enthroned as the Davidic Messiah on the throne of David, and is awaiting the final consummation of his messianic reign” (336). Also, Jesus “has begun his messianic reign as the Davidic king” (Ibid.). In making these claims Ladd acknowledges that this perspective “involves a rather radical reinterpretation of the Old Testament prophecies” (Ibid.).

now then the miracles of that kingdom should be occurring today. In his 1986 book, *Power Evangelism*, which was updated in 2009, the now late Wimber wrote:

I was already acquainted with George Eldon Ladd's writings (he was a Fuller Theological Seminary professor), but it was not until I read his book *Jesus and the Kingdom* that I realized his work on the kingdom formed a theological basis for power evangelism. As I read Dr. Ladd's books, and read afresh the gospel accounts, I became convinced that power evangelism was for today.<sup>2</sup>

In this book, the authors Wimber and Kevin Springer devote Part 1, which consists of five chapters, to the kingdom of God as the theological foundation for their power evangelism approach. Thus, they openly proclaimed an already Davidic reign of Jesus as the basis for signs and wonders in their ministry. One analyzer of the Signs and Wonders movement, Ken Sarles, also noted this connection, "In the Signs and Wonders movement the existence of the miraculous gifts is directly linked to the kingdom of God on earth. The movement has capitalized on a certain view of God's kingdom that provides the theological undergirding for the practice of signs and wonders."<sup>3</sup> Thus, it cannot be emphasized too much that a theology of signs and wonders involves a theology of the kingdom of God. In the case of Wimber, the inaugurated kingdom reign of Jesus was the basis for his views on the continuation of signs and wonders for today.

In general, one's kingdom view will affect how one perceives signs and wonders in this present age. Also, a proper understanding of the kingdom helps us understand the purpose of miracles. On the other hand, a faulty understanding of the kingdom can lead to a wrong view of miracles. Often, when I disagree with those who believe signs and wonders should be regular occurrences today, my main disagreement is usually with their kingdom theology.

Before we delve into the connection between miracles and the kingdom of God, I want to summarize the main point of this article—*Signs and wonders occur in rare and strategic times in history when the nearness of the kingdom of God on earth is being presented or addressed in close connection with Israel. These presentations are associated with unique representatives of God—Moses, Elijah, Jesus, the apostles, and the two witnesses in the book of Revelation. However, this present age we live in is not the Davidic/Messianic reign of Jesus or the Tribulation Period that immediately precedes the kingdom. Continual signs and wonders, therefore, are not a part of God's plan for this age.*

As I make this claim I acknowledge that there are kingdom implications for this present age even though the Davidic reign of the Messiah awaits the future millennial kingdom. Jesus the Messiah, who is the ultimate Son of David, has arrived with His first coming. With His ascension, Jesus currently is exalted at the right hand of the Father as Ps 110:1 predicted. Also, messianic salvation is happening for all who believe in King Jesus (see Acts 15:14–18). So there are kingdom implications now. But

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<sup>2</sup> John Wimber & Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism*, (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1986, 2009), 19).

<sup>3</sup> Ken Sarles, "An Appraisal of the Signs and Wonders Movement," *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March, 1988): 71-72

this era we live in is not the Davidic/Messianic/Millennial *reign* of Jesus, therefore, the miracles that occur with such a reign are not happening in this age. When Jesus returns, the millennial kingdom will bring the binding of Satan, widespread healing of diseases, and resurrection. But these await the future.

In addition, the issue here is not whether God has done or can do miracles. God has done and performs miracles for His purposes. But the claim that signs and wonders should be the normal experience of this age performed by Christians today is incorrect.

### What Are Signs and Wonders?

As we begin this study let us start with some clarifications. *First, when we refer to biblical miracles or signs and wonders, we are speaking of directly supernatural occurrences that cannot be explained by natural processes or laws.* T. R. McNeal rightly describes these as “events which unmistakably involve an immediate and powerful action of God designed to reveal His character or purposes.”<sup>4</sup>

Miracles are often referred to as “signs and wonders” in the Bible. “Signs” point to things. A sign miracle points to the power of God and what He is accomplishing.<sup>5</sup> “Wonders” refer to a response to the miracles. God’s miracles are awesome and draw an appropriate response of wonder and awe. The vast majority of miracles and signs and wonders in the Bible are so powerful that even the enemies of God cannot deny them. Biblical miracles are public, instant, and undeniable. For example, when God performed miracles through Moses at the time of the Exodus, there was no doubt about what happened. Pharaoh and the Egyptians were directly affected. They resisted for a while, but the signs were so powerful and compelling that Pharaoh finally let the Hebrews go. No one needed to convince the Egyptians at that time that real signs and wonders were occurring. Also, when Jesus did His miracles He did them in the open for all to see. And they were undeniable even to those who desired to kill Him. As John 11:47 states:

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs.”

In Acts, before many people in Jerusalem, the apostles declared:

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).

When the apostles performed miracles in Jerusalem in the realm of the hostile religious leaders, no one denied that a miracle had occurred. Also, when the apostles healed a man the religious leaders who killed Jesus could not even deny it:

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<sup>4</sup> T. R. McNeal, “Miracles, Signs, Wonders,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers), 1135.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" . . . And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. . . . "For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:5-7, 14, 16).

Also, in the future Tribulation period the two witnesses of Revelation 11 perform miracles of judgment like those of Moses and Elijah against the earthdwellers for twelve hundred and sixty days (Rev 11:3). Their miracles are public and undeniable by all. In fact, the people rejoice when these two witnesses are killed, hoping their miracles have ended (see Rev 11:9-10).

So the signs and wonders in the Bible were public, instant, and undeniable even to God's enemies. This criterion is important and is the one we should use to evaluate claims in regard to the miraculous. Any who assert that modern signs and wonders are for today must meet this standard. It is one thing to claim signs and wonder are normative for today, it is another to show that they are actually occurring. In our age if Christians were performing the kinds of signs and wonders that occurred in the Bible with huge public crowds in largely populated areas, we probably would be seeing documentation of these. But we are not. No evidence exists that the types of signs and wonders in the Bible are happening today. This is not because God is not powerful. Instead, these demonstrations are not part of God's purposes for today. Those who claim that signs and wonders are normative for today are not performing miracles so powerful that crowds are stunned and skeptics have to admit something supernatural is taking place. This alone casts great doubt on modern claims of miracles. They are not showing that the Bible's standard for miracles is occurring today.

*Second, undeniable signs and wonders occur at strategic times in biblical history through unique representatives of God.* One can find miracles throughout the Bible. No one questions that. Nor does anyone question that God can do miracles today. But there are only a few times in history where miracles come in clusters. And when these clusters occurred they were performed through very select and unique representatives of God and were not normative for others. Let us highlight these.

The first major cluster of signs and wonders is found at the time of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The miracles of this event were so extraordinary that most references to signs and wonders in the Old Testament point back to the Exodus. According to the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* of the 18 Old Testament uses of "signs and wonders" at least 13 refer to the Exodus.<sup>6</sup> Another cluster of miracles occurs during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Over forty miracles occurred in the careers of these two men of God. The next major cluster of miracles appears with the ministry of Jesus, particularly in His early campaign where He performed widespread miracles for the people of Israel. B. B. Warfield observes

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<sup>6</sup> "Miracles," *Baker Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

that as a result of Jesus' healings, "Disease and death must have been almost eliminated for a brief season from Capernaum and the region which lay immediately around Capernaum as a center."<sup>7</sup>

This is followed by the post-Pentecost ministry of the Apostles who also performed signs and wonders, particularly early on and in Jerusalem with large Jewish crowds. The last cluster of miracles is found in the future when the two witnesses of Revelation perform miracles of judgment for 1,260 days in Jerusalem. In each of these miracle clusters, there were or will be unique men of God through whom these miracles were occurring.

*Third, the presence of signs and wonders comes within the context of the nearness of the kingdom of God on earth in relation to Israel.* When signs and wonders occur in clusters there are strong kingdom implications. As Alva McClain observed, "In the Scriptures great public exhibitions of miraculous divine power are invariably connected with the Mediatorial Kingdom of God."<sup>8</sup> And not only this, there is a close connection to God's kingdom purposes with the nation, Israel.<sup>9</sup> This was true at the time of Moses and the Exodus. Yes, the miracles performed at this time served several functions. They showed that Moses was God's man. They were judgments against Pharaoh, Egypt, and the gods of Egypt. Also, they were acts of mercy for the Hebrew people who were suffering. They also coincided with the giving of the Mosaic Law. All these are true. *But the greater purpose involved God's kingdom intentions through the Abrahamic Covenant.* Back in Genesis 12 God promised Abraham that a great nation would come from him and that this nation would be given the promised land as the platform for bringing blessings to all the families and nations of the earth. The Exodus occurred so God's kingdom program with Israel (and eventually the nations) could begin. The Abrahamic Covenant would not be fulfilled if Israel remained forever enslaved in Egypt. The signs and wonders at this time delivered the Hebrew people in dramatic fashion so that God's kingdom on earth with Israel could begin.

After God delivers the Hebrew people from the Egyptians He has a message for them at Sinai. They will receive God's law, which functions as their national constitution, and then God says, "and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). That's the main purpose for the Exodus and miracles associated with it. God's kingdom program involves the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and Abraham's people, Israel, becoming a great kingdom and nation set apart for His purposes. And this is done through the very unique representative, Moses. Miracles, therefore, transpired in connection with the establishment of Israel as God's chosen kingdom and nation on the earth. And it happened with Moses as a unique mediator. Miracles would still occur after Moses. The conquest of the promised land had miracles. Yet even then we are told that no one performed miracles like Moses, not even Joshua:

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<sup>7</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Christianity and Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 54.

<sup>8</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 411.

<sup>9</sup> McClain notes that miracles "are the signs of the Kingdom, given primarily as a testimony to the nation of Israel, to whom in a peculiar sense that Kingdom belonged by divine covenant, and upon whose repentance depended its imminent establishment upon the earth." (Ibid., 411).

Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (Deut 34:9–12).

The next cluster of miracles occurred with Elijah and Elisha as recorded in 1 and 2 Kings. The miracles they performed testified to their credentials as prophets to a rebellious northern kingdom of Israel that was on a fast track toward captivity. They stood as warning posts to a kingdom that was headed toward calamity and dispersion. It would not be long before the northern kingdom would end and go into captivity. The southern kingdom would not be far behind. Also, while we do not know for sure, many believe Elijah will be involved with the signs and wonders that precede Jesus' second coming and kingdom as one of the two witnesses of Revelation. These witnesses shut up the sky so there is no rain, which is reminiscent of what God did through Elijah.

Then the next cluster of miracles was done by Jesus the Messiah and were explicitly related to the proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom to Israel. The summary statement of Jesus' early ministry is found in Matt 4:17: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was immediately followed by a healing ministry in Israel:

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them (Matt 4:23–24).

Matthew 8–9 details Jesus' healing ministry to the people of Israel. And Matt 9:35 offers a summary statement of Jesus' ministry at this point: "Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness." The crowds declared: "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel" (9:33). This shows the startling contrast between what Jesus was doing compared to Israel's history before Him.

With Matthew 10 Jesus delegates the task of kingdom proclamation to Israel with attending miracles:

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness (Matt 10:1).

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'<sup>8</sup> Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons (Matt 10:5–8a).

Several things are worthy of note here. First, Jesus' incredible ability to perform miracles is delegated to "the twelve." Second, the message at this time was only to Israel. Third, the performing of miracles is associated with the nearness of the kingdom. The kingdom is near or "at hand," which means impending or on the brink. Something very special is taking place at this point. This is not a normative situation. Later when the Great Commission is given the disciples were told to take the gospel to the world (see Matt 28:19–20). But here the focus is on Israel.

With Matt 12:22–23 Jesus explicitly explains the significance of His miracles:

Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"

Then Jesus says in Matt 12:28:

"But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

Jesus declares that His miracles point to the kingdom. The kingdom had not actually arrived at this point. Jesus had not been crucified, resurrected or ascended yet. The Day of the Lord had not occurred. But there was a presence of the kingdom in Jesus' person and works that the people were experiencing. Each miracle Jesus did was a sample, glimpse, or foretaste of kingdom conditions, when the restoration of all things would occur. When Jesus the Messiah was standing in the midst of the people and leaders of Israel performing undeniable signs and wonders in the power of the Holy Spirit there was a sense in which the kingdom had come upon the people. It was present in the person and works of the King. The conditions that characterize the kingdom were being shown to them. The Messiah was in their midst. There was the removal of the negative effects of a fallen world such as disease and death. Old Testament kingdom passages predicted a coming era where disease and death would be removed. Isaiah 35 is one such passage:

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened  
 And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.  
 Then the lame will leap like a deer,  
 And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.  
 For waters will break forth in the wilderness  
 And streams in the Arabah.  
 The scorched land will become a pool  
 And the thirsty ground springs of water. . . . (Isa 35:5–7a)

Isaiah 25:6–8 indicates that kingdom conditions bring the removal of death. So when Jesus raised a person from the dead that was a foretaste of the resurrection to come in the kingdom.

In Matthew 11, when John the Baptist was in prison, He wanted confirmation that Jesus really was the One. Jesus responds with words from Isaiah 35:

Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM (Matt 11:2–5).

In sum, Jesus’ miracles were within a kingdom context. At this time in history He was presenting the impending kingdom and kingdom conditions to Israel. Every miracle Jesus did was a foretaste and glimpse of what the kingdom would be like when it arrived.

- When Jesus healed a sick person it was a glimpse of worldwide healing.
- When Jesus raised the dead this was a glimpse of the coming resurrection of the dead.
- When Jesus cast out demons it was a glimpse of the coming removal of Satan from the earth.
- When Jesus showed mastery over nature and animals it was a glimpse of coming harmony over nature.

The focus of Jesus’ ministry changed after the events of Matthew 12. Jesus told the religious leaders that they had committed the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which in its context, was stubborn and willful rejection of Jesus the Messiah who was performing kingdom miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit in their presence. Up until this point both Jesus and the twelve were doing widespread kingdom proclamation to the cities of Israel. After Matthew 12 Jesus withdraws from the crowds and becomes much more focused on preparing the disciples for His coming death. In Matthew 13 Jesus starts speaking in parables which puzzled the disciples at first. Jesus stated that He was communicating in parables now to hide truth from those who would not hear (see Matt 13:13–15). This was a major shift in His teaching approach. Also we are told by Matthew that Jesus’ focus shifts from that earlier in His ministry:

Matt 4:17: From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matt 16:21: From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.



These two “From that time” statements are significant and encapsulate what Jesus’ message is at these strategic times in history. At the time of Matt 4:17 Jesus’ emphasis is on the nearness of the kingdom of heaven and the necessity of repentance for Israel to enter it. Many signs and wonders accompanied this time. Yet according to Matt 16:21, Jesus’ priority shifts to preparing His disciples for the cross. This does not mean that Jesus never does miracles or speaks of the kingdom again. He certainly does. But His emphasis is not on widespread proclamation of the kingdom to the cities of Israel. It is focused on preparing His disciples for His death and sharp confrontations with the opposing religious leaders of Israel.

Moving on—with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, which itself was a unique miracle, another period starts where signs and wonders occur in the context of the kingdom. This time it is at the hands of the apostles. In Acts 3 the apostles, in the heart of Jerusalem at the temple, healed a lame man in the name of Jesus. The crowd was amazed and this led to a proclamation of the kingdom to the “men of Israel” (3:12), the very people who had Jesus killed. In fact, Acts 4:1 says this crowd included the priests and Sadducees. The apostles use the miracle as an opportunity to call the people of Israel to repentance. In Acts 3:18–21 Peter says that Israel’s repentance would lead to forgiveness of sins and the kingdom and the second coming of Jesus:

But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3:18–21)

Here an undeniable miracle leads to a message from Peter to Israel. He preaches that repentance leads to forgiveness of sins which leads to Jesus’ return and the kingdom. On the next day, the miracle was again the basis for proclamation to the leaders of Israel:

On the next day, their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health (Acts 4:5–10).

On multiple occasions the apostles are said to perform “signs and wonders”:

Acts 4:29–30:

And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”

Acts 5:12–16:

At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed.

Several things are worthy of note here. First, “signs and wonders” were being done “at the hands of the apostles” in Jerusalem—not by the Christians as a whole. Close apostolic representatives such as Stephen and Philip would also perform miracles, but miracles were not being performed by the Christian crowd. The miracles were linked to the apostles. Second, like miracles at the Exodus and the ministry of Jesus, the signs and wonders of the apostles were public, instantaneous, and undeniable to everyone. Third, everyone the apostles offered healing to were healed:

They [the multitudes] even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all being healed. (Acts 5:15b–16).

Fourth, the miracles were being performed in Jerusalem as part of the proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom to Israel. Just as Jesus’ miracles were signs of the kingdom to Israel, so too were the miracles of the apostles. The biggest clusters of miracles in Acts were done in Jerusalem before the eyes of all the people and leaders of Israel. As John MacArthur puts it, “The New Testament miracle age was for the purpose of confirming the Word as given by Jesus and the apostles, of offering the kingdom to Israel, and of giving a taste, a sample, of the kingdom.”<sup>10</sup>

History shows that after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 signs and wonders largely ceased. Next, signs and wonders will be performed by special representatives of God during the coming Tribulation—the two witnesses of Revelation 11:

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<sup>10</sup> John F. MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 360.

And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire (Rev 11:3–6).

These two men of God are God's witnesses for 1,260 days, which is half of the seven-year Tribulation period. They have supernatural ability to destroy their enemies and control nature at will. These two witnesses are not named but their miracles are similar to those of Moses and Elijah. Perhaps these witnesses are the actual persons of Moses and Elijah. If so, how fitting that two men of God who were so involved with the kingdom in Israel's history would be present and part of the nearing arrival of the kingdom of Jesus the Messiah?

Even their deaths are miraculous. They are killed but three and a half days later they are resurrected and snatched into heaven (Rev 11:11–12). This time period that they are operating in involves the nearness of the kingdom of God. Just a few verses later we are told:

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, “We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign” (Rev 11:15–17).

Thus, the ministry of the two witnesses is very closely connected with the impending kingdom of Jesus.

So then, when we survey biblical history, it appears that clusters of miracles at the hands of unique servants of God occur during times when the kingdom is being established or presented on the earth. Or in the case of Elijah and Elisha, miracles were a warning for the historical kingdom in Israel as it was heading towards captivity. What does this mean for the present age we live in? This age is not one in which we have prophetic or apostolic representatives performing signs and wonders in connection with the establishment or removal of the kingdom of God on earth. The last cluster of signs and wonders took place before the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem when the apostles were performing miracles mostly in a Jewish context or showing Jews that Gentiles were also the people of God.

As A.D. 70 approached, the signs and wonders even among the apostles seem to wane:

- The last recorded miracle in the Bible occurred around A.D. 60 by Paul on the island of Malta. About three years later Paul wrote that Epaphroditus “was sick to the point of death” (Phil 2:27).

- Around A.D. 67 Paul did not heal Timothy's stomach but recommended a little wine for medicinal purposes (1 Tim 5:23).
- A short time after this Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim 4:20).

The book of Hebrews also gives significant information regarding the strategic time of signs and wonders by the apostles. Hebrews 6:5 makes reference to the audience of Hebrews tasting “the powers of the age to come.” Here we are told that the first-century readers had tasted something. They had tasted miracles. And these miracles are linked with “the age to come.” The age to come is the kingdom of Jesus the Messiah. Thus, these people had tastes and glimpses and previews of the coming kingdom. In addition, the writer of Hebrews links these miracles with the unique ministry of the apostles:

For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will (Heb 2:2–4).

Note that the author links “signs and wonders” with a specific group—“them”—the apostles (“God also testifying with them”). The apostles were the ones “who heard” the words of Jesus. He does not indicate that signs and wonders are an ongoing part of the entire church's ministry, even at this time in the first century. When we look at Hebrews the writer says his readers had tasted the powers of the age to come but then looks back and says these were specifically linked with the ministry of the apostles. This again shows that miracles were done at a unique time with unique representatives.

In surveying Jesus' messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2–3 there is no call for these churches to perform signs and wonders. In fact, the emphasis seems to be on faithful service amidst persecution, and when the kingdom comes then they will be rewarded and reign upon the earth (Rev 2:26–27).

<b>Kingdom Situation</b>	<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Kingdom Mediator(s)</b>	<b>Result</b>
Signs and wonders to deliver Hebrews from Egypt	The period of the Exodus	Moses	Israel established as a kingdom
Signs and wonders as the kingdom in Israel deteriorates (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 13)	Time of Elijah and Elisha	Elijah and Elisha	Israel continues downward spiral to captivity
Signs and wonders as the kingdom presented to Israel (Matt 3-12)	Early ministry of Jesus	Jesus the Messiah	Israel refuses to repent; kingdom to come in the future
Signs and wonders as Jesus and kingdom presented to Israel after Holy Spirit's outpouring (Acts 2-28)	A.D. 33-70	The Apostles	Israel refuses to believe; kingdom to come in the future
Signs and wonders with events of Tribulation Period (Rev 6-19)	Future	Two Witnesses of God in Jerusalem (Moses and Elijah?)	Kingdom and second coming of Jesus to appear very soon

### Miracles and the Davidic Kingdom

There is another important issue that needs to be addressed in regard to miracles and the kingdom. That is the relationship between the promised Davidic/Messianic reign of Jesus and miracles. As mentioned earlier, those who argue for the presence of signs and wonders today explicitly connect their view with the belief that the Davidic/Messianic reign of Jesus is in operation today. Not only does John Wimber do this, but the defender of the Pentecostal/Charismatic view in the book, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, Douglas Oss, does so as well. He devotes several pages to how the Davidic reign is in operation today and says, “our purpose is to apply this principle to the continuity of the miraculous gifts.”<sup>11</sup> He also says “the anointed Davidite, Jesus, passes on his own anointing to those who come under his reign.” His point is this—we are currently in the Davidic reign and kingdom of Jesus, so the miracles of the Davidic kingdom are for today.

Yet while Jesus has been exalted as Messiah at the right hand of God, the Scripture seems to indicate the assumption of His Davidic throne and the beginning of His Davidic reign are still future. For example, Luke 19:11 states, “While they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately.” The people thought the kingdom was going to come very soon, so Jesus gives the parable of the minas to indicate that He must go away first to heaven and then the kingdom will come later. In Matt 19:28 Jesus indicates that his Davidic kingdom reign will

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas A. Oss, “A Pentecostal/Charismatic View,” in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 268, n. 53.

occur when the renewal of the earth takes place and the apostles are ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel:

And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

With Matt 25:31 Jesus links the assumption of His glorious Davidic throne with His second coming with His angels: “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.” The kingdom comes with Jesus’ second coming. In Luke 21 Jesus predicted events in the coming Tribulation period and referred to the kingdom as arriving after these events: “So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.” Note the very kingdom that was near in His early ministry is now said to only be near with the events of the coming Tribulation period. In Rev 3:21 one of the future rewards to the church is this: “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

So on multiple occasions Jesus places His sitting on the throne of David as in the future and with His second coming to earth. This challenges the claim that signs and wonders should occur today because we are in the Davidic kingdom. The evidence suggests otherwise. Robert Saucy makes a good point when he states, “In our opinion the statement of the presence of the kingdom deserves more careful consideration than simply saying it is here and it is coming, or some other ‘already/not yet’ terminology.”<sup>12</sup>

While many aspects of eschatology have occurred with Jesus’ first coming, the thrust of Scripture seems to be on the futurity of the kingdom. Evidence of a present messianic kingdom in this age is not as strong as some think. Christopher Rowland’s skepticism in this regard is well founded:

Despite the fact that the consensus of New Testament scholarship accepts that Jesus believed that the kingdom of God had already in some sense arrived in Jesus’ words and deeds, the fact has to be faced that the evidence in support of such an assumption is not very substantial.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus’ resurrection and ascension mean that Jesus is now fulfilling the promise of Ps 110:1–2 that David’s Lord would be seated at God’s right hand for a time *until* the Messiah reigns over His enemies from Jerusalem. Thus, Jesus fulfills the promise of the Davidic King who is at the right hand of God (already), but His messianic kingdom reign is future (not yet). Thus, there is an already aspect of the Messiah’s session at the right hand of God, but this differs from many already/not yet proposals which view Jesus as reigning currently from the throne of David. To compare:

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<sup>12</sup> Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism, The Interface Between Dispensational & Nondispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 99.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1985), 135–36.

<b>Common Already/Not Yet Proposal</b>	<b>Our Proposal</b>
Jesus reigns from David's throne now and culminates this reign at His return	Jesus possesses all authority at the right hand of the Father now but His reign from David's throne in Jerusalem awaits His return

As this chart shows, our proposal contains an already/not yet scenario, but it is that of Jesus' session at the right hand of the Father being already, with the Davidic reign being not yet.

### Conclusion

Studying the relationships of miracles to the kingdom of God helps with understanding the timing of miracles. Miracles are closely connected with the nearness and presence of the kingdom on earth. The church age we live in is not the messianic kingdom and thus we do not see the miracles of the kingdom in this age.



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