

GOD WHO ANSWERS WITH FIRE

*Winning the World for Christ through the
power of Signs and Wonders.*

The God of Elijah:

“As I live”, says the Lord God, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” Ez. 33:11.

No one can read the bible and miss the picture of the broken heart of God for every lost soul. The whole bible is about God who loved the world so much that He gave his one and only Son for the life of perishing people. It is about the Savior, Jesus, who was equal to God, but he humbled himself to be in the form of man. Then He humbled himself even more to the point of death, the death of the cross for one reason, to seek and to save those who are lost.

This is the only purpose of the church, and the only reason for its existence is to reach the perishing world with the saving, life giving love of God. All the gifts that Jesus gave to his church were for one reason, so that the church may reach the whole world with the power of the gospel. Jesus has not only called his church to win the world, but that he has given his church the power to do that.

The church nowadays live in days like the days of Elijah. In These days, the land was under the rule of Ahab, the wicked king, and the whole nation of Israel went astray from God. Elijah to return the nation back to God, He didn't call the prophets of Baal for reasoning and public debates. Elijah could debate the prophets of Baal and prove to them that Baal can't listen, see...etc. He could use “the words of human wisdom” but he didn't. He knew the power of his God. He knew that it would take the fire of God to return the people of God back to Him from worshipping Idols. It was only the power of God that in one day made the whole nation know the true living God. Elijah knew the power of signs and wonders and its effect. He restore the backslidden nation through the power of God.

Any reader to the word of God will see that the power of God in signs and wonder is God's pattern in evangelism not only in the days of Elijah only, but in the early church as well. In this paper, I'd like to study how church growth and evangelism took place only in the power of God through signs and wonders. I'll focus mainly on the book of Acts, and track how through the power of signs and wonders God led multitudes to know Him.

In the day of Pentecost:

In the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) a hundred and twenty disciples were gathered in one place. Then the Holy Spirit came in tongues of fire over the disciples and they started speaking in different tongues, praising God. There were groups from fifteen nation heard the disciples “speaking in their own tongues the wonderful work of God” Peter then stood up and preached his sermon, as a result of that three thousands were saved. Here we see

how the Holy Spirit, because of the sign of speaking in other tongues, led **three thousands to the saving power of the gospel.**

The second breakthrough in the church:

We read about the second break through in the history of the church in Acts 3. It all started when Peter and John were going to the temple and they saw a lame man at the gates of the temple, Peter told him "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." This lame took place and the lame man started jumping and leaping.

I want to focus on the effect of this miracle on the non-saved. In v 11-12 we read "...**all the people** ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, **greatly amazed.** So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people..." and Peter started preaching his message. Because of this message Peter and John were arrested; however, in Acts 4:4 we read "However, **many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.**" Two more thousands men were saved that day. Even in the Sanhedrim we read that they were amazed, not only because of the boldness of Peter and John though they were "uneducated and untrained men", but also "And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, **they could say nothing against it**" v 14.

The Church grew in Jerusalem through signs and wonders:

- The only way the church multiplied was through the power of the Holy Spirit through signs and wonders. Acts 4:33 "And **with great power** the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all".

- Another interesting passage shows that signs and wonders lead to the salvation of multitudes in Acts 5:12-16. In v 12-13 we read "And through the hands of the apostles **many signs and wonders** were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly" In v 14 we read about the result of these miracles "And believers were **increasingly added** to the Lord, **multitudes** of both men and women" In v 15-16 we read the same, how through signs and wonder multitudes gathered from every where "so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also **a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem,** bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed"

- The ministry of Stephen we read in Acts 5:8-9 "And Stephen, full of faith and power, **did great wonders and signs among the people.** Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen" The bible didn't mention clearly that people were getting saved because of the signs and the wonders that took place through his ministry; however, the bible talked about the disputation that was raised against him. I believe that this disputation was because the increasing number of the Jews who became Christians through the ministry of signs and wonders in Stephen life. I believe that the increasing

number of the “converts” provoked the Jews so much that they found no way to slow the increasing number of Christians except by killing Stephen.

The Church in Samaria started and grew through signs and wonders:

The disciples were scattered because of the persecution. Philip went to Samaria and started the church over there. Here is the biblical account to the beginning of the church in Samaria Acts 8:4 “...Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the **multitudes** with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, **hearing and seeing the miracles which he did**. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of **many** who were possessed; and **many** who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸And there was great joy **in that city**”

Once again it is the power of God through signs and wonders that started the church in Samaria. Healing and exorcism made the power of God so relevant to the people. They knew that Jesus whom Philip is preaching is not a new doctrine, but He is the only way God has provided for our salvation and healing.

The church in Lydda grew through Signs and Wonders:

We read this story in Acts 9:32-35. When Peter went to Lydda, there was a certain man by the name of Aneneas. He was paralyzed for eight years. Peter said to him “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately. The result of this miracle is recorded in v 35 “**So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord**”

The church in Joppa grew through Signs and Wonders

After leaving Lydda, Peter went to Joppa. We read “At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.³⁷But it happened in those days that she became sick and died...”Acts 9:36-37. Peter prayed for her and she was raised from the dead. The result of this miracle we read in Acts 9:42 “And it became known throughout all Joppa, and **many believed on the Lord**”

Individuals got saved through Signs and Wonders:

1. The Ethiopian eunuch: Acts 8

“Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert” Acts 9:26. This Ethiopian eunuch was full of hunger to understand the scripture. Natural ways were not able to make Philip know that. It took a vision of an angel to command Philip to go. As a result of that, Philip went, shared the good news with this Ethiopian man and he got saved.

2. Paul: Acts 9

The dramatic salvation of Paul took place in Acts 9. It was through a vision and a supernatural healing that Paul came to know the lord Jesus Christ. We read that during his trip to Damascus “suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are

- you persecuting Me?" After this vision in Acts 9:3-7, Paul was blinded but a supernatural healing took place in his life through Ananias who "went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized" Acts 9:17-18
3. The first gentile's convert, Cornelius: Acts 10
 God gave a Vision to Cornelius to ask Peter to come "About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius!" send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter" Acts 10:3-5
 God also gave another vision to Peter to go to Cornelius "...he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth..." Acts 10:9-15
 What was the result of these visions and the supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit? The household of Cornelius believed and were baptized "...Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" Acts 10:46-48
4. Sergius the proconsul: Acts 13
 Sergius the proconsul was deceit by a false Jewish prophet, Elymas. When Sergius heard of Paul and Barnabas, he called them to hear the word of the lord. Elymas then tried to "turn the proconsul away from the faith" Acts 13:8 "Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand"
 Now what was the result of this miracle "Then the proconsul **believed, when he saw what had been done**, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord" Acts 13:12

In All These examples, we see how visions and dreams, healing, and supernatural signs lead to the salvation of these individuals.

The Church in Antioch:

Let us examine how the church in Antioch grew. "When they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. **And the hand of the Lord was with them**, and a **great number believed and turned to the Lord.**" Acts 11:20-21. The Bible didn't mention the words signs and wonders directly in this particular account. However; what Luke said "And the hand of the Lord was with them" refers to something different than preaching. I do believe that Luke speaks about the manifestation of the

hand of the lord in a supernatural way, in signs and wonders. The result of the preaching and the works of the hand of the lord is that “a great number believed and turned to the Lord”

The Church in Iconium:

The story of this church is mentioned in Acts 14:1-7 “... the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, **who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.** But **the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles**”

Once again, in the face of all the works of the devil and all the persecution, because of the power of God in signs and wonders half of the city came to know the Lord.

The church in Philippi:

We read the story of this church in Acts 16. It all started with a vision of a Macedonian man pleading with Paul to “Come over to Macedonia and help us”. Paul went and met Lydia whom God opened her heart to the gospel v11-15, she believed with all her house “they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and **when they had seen the brethren,** they encouraged them and departed” v 40 . Then it was the casting of the spirit of divination v 16-24 then the supernatural earthquake and the supernatural opening of the jail’s gates that made the jailer wondered “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” v 25-34 The result was that him and all his household believed “having believed in God with **all his household**”. It was all because of the power of God in signs and wonders that made the church to start in Philippi.

The church in Thessalonica:

The Bible in Acts 17 didn’t mention any miracles at all. The Bible spoke only on the result of the ministry of Paul and Silas in Acts 17:4 “And some of them were persuaded; and a **great multitude** of the devout Greeks, and **not a few of the leading women,** joined Paul and Silas” However, Paul himself talked about the signs and wonders that took place to start this church in 1 Thess.1:5 “For our gospel did not come to you in word **only,** but **also in power,** and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake” then Paul talked about the result of this power that they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” v 9
Once again, God’s signs and wonders led multitudes come to know the him.

The Church in Corinth:

We read about the starting of the church in Acts 18. In Acts 18 there is no direct mention of signs and wonders, but 1 Cor. 12-14 talks about how the believers in this church didn’t lack any gift in the Spirit. There was no church that Paul taught them about operating in the gifts of signs and wonders like the church of Corinth. Healing and all kind of supernatural miracles were so common in this church.

The Church in Ephesus:

The church in Ephesus started and multiplied through supernatural signs and wonders. We read this story in Acts 19. When Paul went there some of them were Christians but didn't receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When Paul laid his hands on them, they started speaking in tongues and prophesying Acts 19:1-10. Paul stayed there for two years "so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Now God worked **unusual miracles** by the hands of Paul, so that **even handkerchiefs** or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, **and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them**" The Bible also mention the story of the sons of Sceva whom tried to cast out demons by the name of Jesus whom Paul preaching v 13-16. Now what was the result of these miracles? "This became known both to **all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus**; and fear fell on them all, and **the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified**. And **many who had believed** came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, **many of those who had practiced magic** brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. So **the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed**" v 17-20. What a mighty revival and a great breakthrough!

The church in Galacia:

The Galatians' church witnessed many miracles. Paul described the Lord Jesus to the Galatians as "He who supplies the Spirit to you and **works miracles** among you" Gal. 3:5. Again and again, it is the power of God in signs and wonders that started churches and made it to grow.

Paul's testimony to the power of Miracles in winning souls:

Romans 15:18-20 "For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, **to make the Gentiles obedient, in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ**. And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, **not where Christ was named**, lest I should build on another man's foundation"

That was Paul's way to reach "not where Christ was named" is to "preach the gospel" "in mighty signs and wonders". No wonder, so many souls came to know Christ through him. 1 Cor. 2:4-5 "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, **but in demonstration of the Holy Spirit and power. That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God**"

As a typical evangelist, Paul knew that the gospel meant to be proclaimed in the supernatural power of God.

In conclusion, visions, healings, signs, wonders, miracles...etc, were the key for the biblical church to grow and win souls. I do belief that this is the key of our world's problems. In the face of 2.2 billions who haven't heard the gospel yet. In the face of the closed Muslim world, and all the evil of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism only the power of God is needed. Back to Elijah strategy, let the real God reveal Himself. *Yes there are so many*

gods in our world, but only our God can answer with fire. So let us release the power of God in signs and wonders to win our perishing world for our Savior.