

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #73:

MIRACLES

By John Temples

“It’s a miracle!” Is it?

A lot of people, even religious people, use the word *miracle* very loosely today; certainly not in the Scriptural sense. They define a miracle as “any event or accomplishment that is awe-inspiring, amazing, or wonderful.” Lots of events and accomplishments could come under that definition: a colorful sunrise...a stunning natural landscape...the birth of a baby...or a long-shot team winning the World Series. We speak of miracle drugs, miracle cures, and miracle accident survival. And then there’s the used car dealership called “Miracle Motors” (whose advertising slogan is, “If it runs, it’s a Miracle”).

But a sunrise and the birth of a baby are quite natural events, subject to and explainable by natural law. A miracle is more accurately defined as something *outside of* natural law. Here are some accurate dictionary definitions:

- “A suspension or violation of natural law.”
- “An event that is contrary to the established laws of nature and can only be attributed to a supernatural cause.”
- “a surprising event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency.”

The miracles performed by Jesus fit these definitions. They were genuine violations of natural law, not just amazing occurrences. The people who witnessed His miracles accurately recognized their true nature. John 3:2 says, “[Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night and said to Him, ‘Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.’” Here are some characteristics of genuine miracles (such as those done by Jesus and His apostles):

- *They were not just awe-inspiring events, but direct violations of natural law.* Examples: walking on water, reattaching severed ears, curing the blind, and raising people from the dead.
- *They were real, testable, visible events, confirmed by multiple eyewitnesses in most cases.* Many of Jesus's miracles were done in front of large crowds. Even His enemies did not deny the reality of His miracles; they just tried to attribute His power to Satan instead of God. (Contrast the genuine, unquestionable miracles of Jesus with the vague, untestable "miracles" of modern faith healers--they never attempt to reattach a severed limb or cure a withered arm. They work on invisible maladies, the success of which cannot be tested.)
- *The results of real miracles were instantaneous and complete.* Jesus's "patients" did not just get better over a period of time, they were instantly restored to perfect health. Luke 4:38-39 records the healing of Peter's mother-in-law from a high fever. Nowadays, if you have an infection and/or a high fever, you might get over it in a few days or weeks; that's natural. But even when you do, you don't immediately resume your normal activities--you're weak and need some time to recuperate. Luke 4:39 says, however, "So He stood over her and rebuked the fever; and it left her. *And immediately she arose and served them.*"

"Immediately" is a word that occurs often in the records of the miracles of Jesus and the apostles. You never read such statements as "Paul prayed for him, and in a few weeks he got better." Yet, such testimonies are common among modern people duped by charlatans.

Luke 5 records the healing of a man who had been paralyzed for some time. Not only did his paralysis immediately disappear at the command of Jesus, but he "took up his bed (pallet) and walked." The brain/nerve/muscle pathways that enable walking were instantly and completely restored. No rehab or weeks of therapy required!

Another characteristic of genuine Bible miracles is that they were independent of any secondary causes. That simply means that there was no possible alternative natural explanation. There is just no natural way to explain how a man blind from birth could immediately see (John 9:1-7). Or, how a man dead for four days could come out of his grave at Jesus's command (John 11:39).

So, the genuine miracles of Jesus and the apostles--

- --were direct violations of the laws of nature, not just awe-inspiring events.
- --were visible and attested by eyewitnesses.
- --were instantaneous and complete.
- --were unexplainable by any natural processes.

THE PURPOSES OF MIRACLES IN BIBLE TIMES

Why did God use miracles in certain historical settings? There were three reasons: to BEGIN things...to REVEAL things...and to CONFIRM things.

God used miracles to get the physical world up and running. He created matter and life from nothing simply by speaking it into existence. God also used miracles for His second creation: the church. It's important to realize that God created the first living things by miracle; but they reproduce by natural means (such as seed). That is true in both the physical and the spiritual realm. The church began by miracle, but it reproduces by seed (the word of God, Luke 8:11).

God also used miracles to reveal His word to mankind. He spoke directly to men in Old Testament times, and delivered His will to them through visions, direct mental inspiration, writing on stones, supernatural phenomena, etc. The New Testament was similarly produced by miraculous inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21).

God used miracles to confirm things. Many of the miracles of Christ and the apostles were acts of compassion; however, their ultimate purpose was not primarily the relieving of suffering but the certification of the message preached by Him and His authorized representatives. The claim of Jesus to be the Son of God

needed to be confirmed (since there were many wanna-be Messiahs roaming about); so God enabled Him to prove His identity through miracles. (Recall Nicodemus's admission that the miracles proved that Jesus was from God.) The apostles also needed accreditation as they preached. After all, anyone could walk into a first-century church assembly and say, "I'm an apostle and I have a message from God for you." God provided authentication and confirmation for the apostles by miraculous powers (Mark 16:20, John 20:30-31, Hebrews 2:1-4).

THE "CHAIN OF CONTINUITY" OF MIRACULOUS POWERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

We've already noted that the apostles could perform miracles to validate their message. They could also empower others in the early church to perform miracles by laying on of hands. This was necessary in the infancy of the church, before the New Testament was completed. Preachers, teachers, and even song and prayer leaders of the early church had to have divine assistance in carrying out their duties.

But here is an important fact: *those on whom the apostles laid hands could not pass on miraculous powers to anyone else.* That's made clear in Acts 8, which records the preaching of Philip in the city of Samaria. (Philip was one of the original servants of the church in Jerusalem, Acts 6:1-5. He received miraculous power by the laying on of the apostles' hands, Acts 6:5-6.) Philip's preaching in Samaria was accompanied by miracles (again, for confirmation that his message was from God). Acts 8:6 says, "And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." The record continues in Acts 8:14-17--"Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit [the miraculous powers imparted by the Holy Spirit]. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

This account is conclusive proof that those on whom the apostles laid hands could not pass on the miraculous powers that had been imparted to them; otherwise,

Philip could have simply done it himself. Peter and John would not have had to come to Samaria.

The point is this: *the miracles of the first century had a finite lifespan*. God never intended for miracles to be permanent fixtures in the world or in the church. They were temporary expedients needed to get the church up and running and the New Testament completed and confirmed. Once those things were accomplished, the miracles ceased.

As an illustration, consider the scaffolding seen around buildings under construction. The scaffolding is needed while the building is being built; but when the building is finished, the scaffolding is taken down. Miracles were needed while the church was under construction, but once it was completely established, the miracles were no longer needed. That leads to this important conclusion:

THERE ARE NO GENUINE MIRACLES BEING PERFORMED TODAY

Remember the three reasons God used miracles: to begin things (the natural world and the church), to reveal things (the complete inspired Bible), and to confirm things. In the case of the church, all those things have been accomplished; therefore, the miraculous element of Christianity has ceased. The church now reproduces by natural (spiritual) law.

Do we find Biblical confirmation of the cessation of miracles? Yes, in several Scriptures; but the main one is 1 Corinthians 13:8-10: "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies [miraculous revelations], they will fail [cease]; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge [supernatural, inspired knowledge], it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." The "that which is perfect" that Paul spoke of we believe to be the completed Scriptures. Many people assume this is talking about the second coming of Christ, but note that Paul says "that which" (a thing), not "He who" (a person).

Consider also the reality that we just do not see miracles being done today. People are not being miraculously and instantly raised from the dead or healed on congenital blindness merely by verbal command. The old Restoration preachers explained it this way: we no longer have miracles because the NEED is gone...the SOURCE is gone...and the PROOF is gone.

The NEED is gone--we have the complete Bible and the complete church. *The SOURCE of miraculous power is gone*--Jesus has gone back to heaven, and all the apostles are dead; so there is no way to obtain miraculous power today. *The PROOF is gone*--we simply have no demonstrated, proven violations of natural law in the present day comparable to what we read about in the Bible.

SOME OBJECTIONS BY THOSE WHO BELIEVE MIRACLES ARE STILL BEING PERFORMED:

"To say that miracles have ceased is to limit God's power." No, God is all-powerful, just as He has always been. It is not a question of what God CAN do, but what He CHOOSES to do.

"The Bible says Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), so He is still imparting miraculous power to people today." It is true that God's nature (and that of Christ) has not changed; but His ways of dealing with mankind--His covenants and conditions--certainly have changed.

"The Bible says signs will follow those who believe." Yes, in Mark 16:17-18, immediately after giving the Great Commission to preach the gospel in all the world, Jesus said, "And these signs will follow those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." Guess what? The signs are still following! We still have the eyewitness accounts of those who saw the Lord and His apostles do miraculous things. These are written so that we might believe (John 20:30-31). You know, once the Supreme Court confirms the decision of a lower court, it does not have to re-confirm the same ruling over and over. Similarly, the miraculous

acts of the first-century apostles are still on the record, still confirmed; and they still give us all the proof we need to recognize Jesus as Lord.

“If miracles have ceased, there is no need to pray for healing or for blessings.” Not true; in fact, we are under orders to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The only difference is that we do not expect God to miraculously intervene in our lives. God still heals! But He chooses to work now through natural law, not miracles. (We call God working through natural law “providence.”) --John Temples

POSTSCRIPT REGARDING SO-CALLED “FAITH HEALERS” TODAY:

We have spoken of the differences between the genuine miracles of our Lord and the pseudo-miracles of certain high-profile individuals today. Here is one more indisputable and stark difference: *There was no money involved* in the true healings of the Bible! One miracle recorded in Acts 3 is characteristic of them all: Peter and John encountered a man lame from his birth while they were in the temple. The lame man asked for help (expecting a handout). Acts 3:6-8 says, “Then Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately¹ his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up stood and walked and entered the temple with them--walking, leaping, and praising God.” Peter said something no high-profile faith healer today could say: “Silver and gold have I none”!

POST-POSTSCRIPT: For an even more detailed explanation of this subject, I highly recommend brother Wayne Jackson’s article at <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/5-what-does-the-bible-say-about-miracles>

¹ There’s that word again.