

About Miracles

Barry O'Dell

The word “miracle” occurs 37 times in the KJV - five times in the Old Testament and thirty-two in the New. There are two different Greek words that are translated as *miracle* in the New Testament. One word (δύναμις) means “ability or power” and is found in Mark 9:39 and Acts 8:13. Another word (σημείον) means “sign, mark, token” and is found in John 4:54 and Acts 15:12. There are times when the word *gift* refers to the miraculous, such as in Acts 8:20 and 10:45. These words, among others, show that the events recorded in Scripture and called *miracles* were not just hard-to-believe events. Many people today use the word *miracle* when describing something that was amazing to witness or completely unexpected. A good definition of the word miracle might be something like “an occurrence that cannot be attributed to the normal events of nature and must be assigned to the supernatural.” Defined as such, the birth of a child is not a miracle. Surviving a horrific car accident, while perhaps totally unexpected, is not a miracle.

A good way to approach and understand the study of Biblical miracles is simply to consider the act itself and not just the word. Matthew, Mark, and Luke record many miracles performed by Jesus. Sometimes it is a specified person and event and sometimes it is a very general statement. Matthew 8 serves as a good example of this.

- Verses 1-4 - Jesus cleansed a leper.
- Verses 5-13 - Jesus healed the centurion’s servant without even being with him.
- Verses 14-15 - Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law.
- Verses 16-18 - Jesus healed those who were demon possessed and “all” the sick who were brought to Him.

The acrostic IOU is a helpful tool in remembering the nature of Biblical miracles. They were...

I-mmediate

O-bservable

U-ndeniable, even by enemies.

Consider the raising of Lazarus. John recorded this response to his being raised from the dead by Jesus: “Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on Him. But

some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done. Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? For this Man doeth many miracles. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (Jn. 11:45-48). This event was immediate because when Jesus told him to come forth, he did. It was observable in that many witnessed a person who had died walking out of the tomb in which he was buried. Finally, the event was clearly undeniable because even the enemies of Jesus understood the implications of His “many miracles.”

The same is true of the miraculous actions of the apostles of Jesus. Acts 3:1-10 records Peter and John healing a lame man who was over forty years of age (Acts 4:22). To be *lame* (χωλός) means that the man was crippled. Scripture reveals that as Peter and John approached, the crippled man was expecting nothing

but money (Acts 3:5-6). However, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” the crippled man was “immediately” healed (Acts 3:6-7). Scripture then records this: “And beholding the man which was

healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it...What shall we do to these men? For that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:14-16). Just as with Jesus’ miraculous act, this was immediate (Acts 3:7), observable, and undeniable (Acts 4:16). There could be many more passages listed that reveal the same pattern of IOU. What about the practical application? Why does this matter? Should we be expecting miracles today? Is God still active if there are no miracles?

Let’s start with what Scripture reveals about the duration of miraculous activity. The post-captivity prophet Zechariah wrote much about the coming Messiah. He also prophetically wrote of the first century and, ultimately, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in AD 70 (Zech 12-14). Within that context he wrote, “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I

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The Truth, The Whole Truth, and Nothing But the Truth

While Jesus was on trial with Pilate, Pilate asked a question that was rhetorical in nature. John 18:37-38 says “Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’ Pilate said to Him, ‘What is truth?’ And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, ‘I find no fault in Him at all.’”

Pilate’s question was based on political considerations against a backdrop in Judea that was continually changing. Pilate was sent into the region by the Roman Empire to quell the unrest that had impacted the area. In four decades, the temple and the city of Jerusalem would be laid waste by the Roman General Titus and his forces.

People in all ages and various walks of life have played loosely with the truth. Pilate was not the first politician nor would he be the last to twist, bend, break, and destroy the truth. The truth is valuable to God and those who strive to follow Him. Proverbs 23:23 says, “Buy the truth, and do not sell it, *Also* wisdom and instruction and understanding.”

One could cite many examples of people who redefine what the truth is. Just recently, Katherine Maher, the new CEO of National Public Radio or NPR, was recently interviewed about her view of the “truth.” For a moment, consider a quote from her:

Perhaps, on most tricky disagreements [regarding religion and politics in the context—JOT], seeking the truth and seeking to convince others of the truth might not be the right place to start. In fact, our reverence for the truth might be a distraction that's getting in the way of finding common ground and getting things done. Now, that is not to say that the truth doesn't exist, nor is it to say that the truth isn't important...I think if I were to really ask you to think about this, one of the things that we could all acknowledge is that part of the reason we have such glorious chronicles to the human experience in all forms of culture is because we acknowledge there are many different truths... I'm certain that the truth exists for you and probably for the person sitting next to you. But

this may not be the same truth. That is because the truth of the matter is very often for many people what happens when we merge facts about the world with our beliefs about the world. So we all have different truths. They are based on things like where we come from, how we were raised, and how other people perceive us.

Postmodernists have a truly warped view of what truth is. One commentator called the above discourse “absolute garbage.”

Regardless of what postmodernists say, one can arrive at the objective, revealed truth. We can understand the truth and apply it to our lives. We can know what we must do to have eternal life. John 8:31-32 says, “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” The promise of the Master is that we can absolutely know the truth from God and that truth will make His people “free.” To say we cannot know the truth, turns God into a liar and makes salvation and morality an unobtainable goal!

God’s word provides the truth for one to examine, study, and confirm the sayings and teachings of others. John 17:17

says, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” If we revere God, we will have a reverence for the truth and seek it for our lives - unlike what the CEO of NPR said.

The idea of “many different truths” is the problem humankind has wrestled with from the beginning of time. There was God’s truth, Satan’s partial truth, and humanity’s ability to choose (Gen. 3:1-7). Just like Adam and Eve failed by listening to Satan, we fail by making decisions separate from God’s guidance.

The idea of “many different truths” has created a polytheistic, pagan world. The only God and the only means of being saved is through Jesus Christ. This is an undeniable truth that a postmodern world rejects. First John 2:21-23 says, “I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”

Departures from biblical truth will cause many

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The Truth...

people to be eternally lost. The inspired writers understood this and warned first century Christians about those who would corrupt sound doctrine. Second Peter 2:1-3 says, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”

The truth matters! Regardless of how people

discount it and pervert it. The truth will set people free from the bondage of sin and death. The truth will dispel false teachings and set people on a correct pathway, biblically speaking. The truth is important.

Article by Johnny O. Trail - Hillcrest church of Christ - Springfield, TN

Works Cited

1. <https://www.iheartradio.com/podcast/867-verdict-with-ted-cruz-56253661/episode/biden-ignores-antisemitism-npr-ceo-has-171332424/>.
2. Ibid.

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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. 13:1-2). It is clear from this that in the day (period of time) in which Christ’s blood was shed (*a fountain for sin and uncleanness*), prophecy and the unclean spirit would pass from the land. Paul, in two passages, addressed the cessation of miraculous activities (spiritual gifts). First Corinthians 13 is perhaps the most well known passage in this discussion. While the nine spiritual gifts were enumerated in 12:7-11, the next chapter clearly states that those gifts would *fail, cease, and vanish away* (1 Cor. 13:8). In Ephesians 4:7-8 we learn that when Jesus ascended, He gave “*gifts*” unto men for specifically stated purposes (Eph. 4:11-12). He then wrote, “*Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*” (Eph. 4:13). Notice, *unity, knowledge, and perfect*. The word *till* (μέχρι) is an adverb “marking a terminus both of place and time.” In other words, just as prophesied by Zechariah and himself earlier, Paul stated by inspiration of the Spirit that the miraculous (aka, spiritual gifts) would cease.

Acts 8 is also integral to this discussion. Because of persecution, the gospel began to spread far beyond the city of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4). Philip, one of the chosen seven from Acts 6, went to Samaria, preached Christ unto them, and confirmed his words with miraculous signs (Acts 8:5-13). A man named Simon is singled out as having heard, believed, and been baptized (8:13). That man is significant because he was

a “*sorcerer.*” He was involved in the magical arts, but the true miracles performed by Philip confirmed for Simon the truth of the preached message (Acts 8:13b). Notice, the Samaritans, including Simon, had been baptized, but had yet to “*receive the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 8:15). Because of this, Peter and John were sent to Samaria, they laid their hands on those who had been baptized, and “*they received the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 8:17). Simon understood how the Holy Spirit was “*received.*” It was through the “*laying on of the apostles’ hands*” (Acts 8:18). Here are some conclusions: (1) The miraculous was prophesied to end (Zech. 13:1-2; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 4). (2) The *gifts* lasted “*till...*” - definitely indicating a period of time (Eph. 4:13). (3) The miraculous manifestations (spiritual gifts) were passed on (*received* - Acts 8:15, 17-18) by the *laying on* of apostolic hands. (4) Therefore, we can know **when** the miraculous age ended.

Now, does this mean that God is no longer active in the world? Absolutely not! Do you pray in faith with no doubting? Certainly! To acknowledge the Biblical doctrine of cessationism is not to deny the working or power of God in the world today. This is not a question of what God *can* do, but of what His word teaches regarding the end of the miraculous age. The dead are not being raised today. Severed body parts are not being restored (Lk. 22:49-51). The crippled are not being given the strength to walk (Acts 3-4). God has magnified His word above His name (Ps. 138:2). Among all the revelations of Himself, God’s word is the highest! Hard-to-believe, amazing occurrences are not miraculous manifestations of God’s power.

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The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

Salvation

- Saved by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Heard, believed, baptized (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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Editor - Barry O'Dell - Office Phone - (870) 625-3217