

**GOOD NEWS**  
for the unsaved  
WORLD!

(#41)

What about miraculous demonstrations of the Spirit's presence?

WHY HAVEN'T YOU SAID ANYTHING ABOUT MIRACLES, SPEAKING IN TONGUES, SIGNS AND WONDERS, AND THINGS LIKE THAT? THEY'RE ALSO IN THE BOOK OF ACTS!

IF YOU'RE CLAIMING WE NEED TO BE LIKE THE EARLY CHRISTIANS, THEN WHAT ABOUT *THOSE THINGS*?

BESIDES, IF I COULD DO THOSE THINGS, I'D BE MORE SURE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS AT WORK IN MY LIFE!

**SURPRISE!**  
TODAY'S THE DAY WE FOCUS ON THOSE ISSUES!

WE ARE GOING TO USE THE WORD "**MIRACLE**" TO REPRESENT ALL OF THESE TYPES OF THINGS.

**FIRST OF ALL, THERE ARE A COUPLE THINGS WE NEED TO REALIZE:**

**1) MIRACLES ARE NOT ALWAYS "SUPERNATURAL."**

- The Scriptural concept refers to an "act of power."
- God can use the laws of nature (which he created) in unexpected ways, to accomplish his purposes. (This would be a "providential" miracle.)
- Though God can overrule the laws of nature to do something supernatural, using the laws in unexpected ways is often the more amazing feat.

**2) THE DEVIL CAN DO MIRACLES... HIS FOLLOWERS OFTEN CAN.**

- Many Scripture passages refer to the devil and his followers as doing "acts of power" (miracles).
- Because of this, the "ability to do miracles" is no indication of salvation!**

The man of sin will come with **the power of Satan**. He will use every kind of **power**, including **miraculous and wonderful signs**.

2 Thes. 2:9a (GW)

"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name **drive out demons** and **perform many miracles?**' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you **evildoers!**' "

Matthew 7:22-23 (NIV)

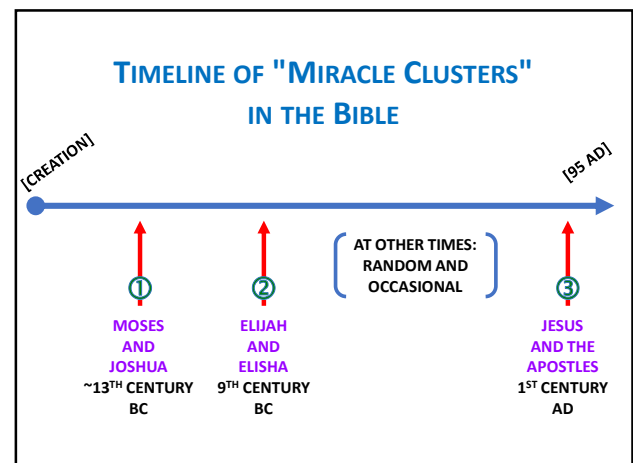
**ISSUE #1: MIRACLES... IN THE PAST AND/OR PRESENT?**

**1) GOD CAN DO WHAT HE WANTS (= ANYTHING CONSISTENT WITH HIS NATURE).**

- He can do miracles, if he wants. He can refrain from doing miracles, if he wants.

**2) IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE, THERE ARE ONLY THREE OCCASIONS WHEN THERE WERE LARGE CLUSTERS OF MIRACLES.**

- Occasional miraculous events are found randomly throughout Scripture, but they were not commonly-occurring events.



**3) EVEN DURING THE TIMES OF THE "MIRACLE CLUSTERS," THERE WERE MANY INSTANCES OF MIRACLES NOT OCCURRING.**

And in the prophet Elisha's time, there were many in Israel who had leprosy, and yet not one of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.  
Luke 4:27 (CSB)

... I [Paul] left Trophimus sick at Miletus.  
2 Tim. 4:20b (NLT)

[Epaphroditus, Paul's coworker] Indeed, he was so sick that he almost died.  
Philip. 2:27a (GW)

**4) ARE MIRACLES OCCURRING TODAY?**

- ✓ There seems to be verifiable evidence that "unexplainable things" (miracles, dreams, visions, etc.) are happening, randomly across the world. [Example – next page.]
- ✓ Scripture seems to suggest another high concentration of miracles when Jesus returns. [We aren't there yet.]



**MIRACLES TODAY?  
HOW WOULD YOU INTERPRET THIS?**

The following illustration *isn't* from 2000 years ago, but represents something that happens today, in Islamic countries.

**SUPPOSE** you were a Christian in an Islamic country, and a Muslim came to your door (perhaps looking somewhat afraid, and perhaps not wanting anyone else to see him there)...

**SUPPOSE** he said, "I've been asking God to show me the true way. Last night, I had a vision of Jesus, and he told me to come to you, so I could learn about him in the Bible."

>> HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND? <<

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**SOMETHING LIKE THIS?**

- "God doesn't do things like that. Go away."
- "You did not have a vision. Go see a psychiatrist!"
- "It must have been the devil; God no longer uses visions."

**OR THIS WAY?**

"Come in. Let me tell you about the Jesus you saw in your vision!"

Events such as this have happened in too many different places, for all of them to be fake or contrived. The people do become saved and eager to serve God – even in spite of severe persecution. But here's the key issue:

EVEN THOUGH THE MIRACULOUS EVENT POINTED THEM TO CHRIST...

\* THEY PUT THEIR FOCUS (AND TRUST) ON CHRIST, NOT ON THE MIRACLE (= THE "POINTER")!

GOD MAY HAVE USED A VISION...

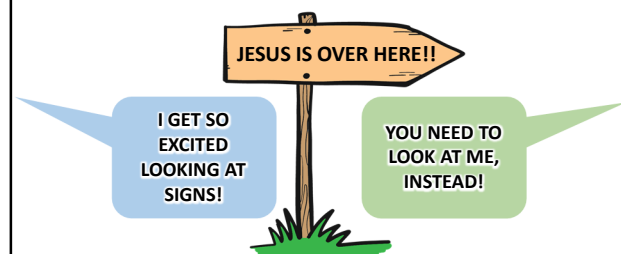
BUT WHAT REALLY MATTERS IS THIS:

I AM NOW FOLLOWING JESUS!

Their GOAL wasn't: "TO EXPERIENCE A MIRACLE," but: "TO FOLLOW JESUS."

**ISSUE #2: BEWARE OF HAVING A FALSE FOCUS**

SIGNS, WONDERS, AND MIRACLES WERE GIVEN FOR A PURPOSE. GOD WANTS US TO FOCUS ON THE PURPOSE, NOT THE POINTER!



**THOUGH JESUS PERFORMED MIRACLES, THAT WASN'T HIS PURPOSE FOR COMING!**

**HIS GOAL WASN'T "HUMAN BETTERMENT."**  
 He didn't come to impress people, or to leave them food-filled, disease-free and happy.

**HIS GOAL WAS TO TEACH – TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS.**  
 The miracles were intended to *point* to the truth people needed to learn.

When people refused to learn, Jesus *stopped* doing the miracles. (Example: John 6.)

**THOSE WHO SAW THINGS THE WORLD'S WAY WOULD SEE JESUS AS A "MIRACLE WORKER."**  
 (At first, even his brothers saw him this way.)

Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world."  
 John 7:3-4 (NIV)

WHAT THEY PICTURED JESUS AS DOING:

FOLLOW ME ... I'M A MIRACLE WORKER!

THIS LOOKS LIKE FUN! MAYBE I'LL GET SOMETHING OUT OF IT! [HOW THE WORLD MIGHT REACT.]

**MANY MODERN-DAY "MIRACLE WORKERS" FOLLOW THE ADVICE OF JESUS' BROTHERS.**

- ✓ Gaining followers, who can observe (and talk about) the miracles being done.
- ✓ Becoming a public figure, instead of acting in secret.
- ✓ Showing themselves to the world.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE HEALED, COME TO THE FRONT OF THE STADIUM!

IF YOU'RE AT HOME, PUT YOUR HANDS ON THE TELEVISION SET!

(THEY DON'T FOLLOW JESUS' EXAMPLE.)



**THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS SAW IT AS MERELY AN "OCCUPATION" – A TYPE OF "WORK" THAT SHOULD BE DONE SIX DAYS/WEEK.**  
 (They did *not* see it as an expression of love for God and neighbor.)

The synagogue leader was irritated with Jesus for healing on the day of worship. The leader told the crowd, "There are six days when work can be done. So come on one of those days to be healed. Don't come on the day of worship."  
 Luke 13:14 (GW)

("LOVE FOR GOD AND NEIGHBOR" is a 7 day/week obligation!)

DO YOUR "MIRACLE WORKING" DURING THE "WORK WEEK," NOT ON THE DAY OF WORSHIP!

**IN CONTRAST... JESUS VIEWED HIMSELF AS A "GOOD NEWS PROCLAIMER."**

WHEN PEOPLE WANTED A "SECOND HELPING" OF MIRACLES ...

[Jesus] replied, "I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other places, too, because *that is why I was sent.*"  
 Luke 4:43 (NLT) [THEN HE WOULD GO SOMEWHERE ELSE.]

WHEN PEOPLE "ADVERTISED" THE MIRACLES, IT CREATED PROBLEMS FOR JESUS.

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. ..."

Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.  
 Mark 1:43-44a 45 (NIV) [THEY CAME FOR THE WRONG REASON.]

**WHEN JESUS TOLD PEOPLE TO FOCUS ON THE "REALITY" INSTEAD OF THE "FREE FOOD," THEY OFTEN QUIT FOLLOWING HIM.**

NO MORE FREE HANDOUTS? HE'S NO FUN!

From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.  
 John 6:66 (NIV)

ONLY A FEW WERE WILLING TO LOOK BEYOND THE "POINTER" TO THE "REALITY" IT POINTED TO.

Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you going to leave, too?"

Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life. We believe them, and we know you are the Holy One of God."  
 John 6:67-69 (NLT)

### ISSUE #3: THERE WERE TWO TYPES OF MIRACLES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

#### TYPE 1 – THOSE CONNECTED TO A SPECIFIC EVENT.

- These pointed to a new beginning. God was doing something new! (Something the prophets had said would happen.)
- Once they had done their job, these miraculous events would not need repeated.

#### EXAMPLES: MIRACLES THAT AFFIRMED THE FOLLOWING:

- ✓ Jesus rose from the dead.
- ✓ The Holy Spirit was coming.
- ✓ The apostles were being sent by Jesus to proclaim the Good News.
- ✓ The Good news was available for Jews... for Samaritans... for Gentiles...



IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE JEWS WERE SOMETIMES TOLD TO ASK FOR MIRACULOUS SIGNS!

- The problem occurred when they rejected the signs they were given!

IN JESUS' DAY ⇨

[THEY KNEW ABOUT JESUS' SIGNS.]  
"This man certainly performs many miraculous signs."

[THEIR RESPONSE?]

So from that time on the Jewish leaders began to plot Jesus' death.

John 11:47b, 53 (NLT)

IN THE EARLY CHURCH ⇨

most Jews still rejected the signs they were given.

#### TYPE 2 – THOSE NOT CONNECTED TO A SPECIFIC EVENT.

- These did not point to "first-time" historical events. They could be repeated at different times and places.
- Even so, they still had a purpose beyond themselves. They were still just pointers.

✓ THEY WERE NOT INTENDED TO BE THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION!

(TODAY: If a genuine, Holy Spirit-induced miracle were to occur, it would fall into this category.)

### FINALLY: SHOULD WE PURSUE MIRACULOUS ACTIVITIES TODAY?

- If we look at all the activities that the Holy Spirit does in a person's life, we discover:

✓ We are told that certain things will be present, if the Spirit is present.

✓ But miraculous activities are not described this way!

### SCRIPTURE TELLS US: IF A PERSON IS SAVED, CERTAIN TYPES OF THINGS WILL BE PRESENT: \*

- ✓ Godly moral character traits/virtues.
- ✓ A willingness to use one's "gifts" for the good of others.
- ✓ Power to obey; growth toward holiness; a teachable spirit.
- ✓ Prayerfulness; a willingness to tell others the Good News.
- ✓ Etc.

WE DO NOT FIND SCRIPTURE PASSAGES THAT PLACE "THE ABILITY TO PERFORM MIRACLES" IN THIS CATEGORY!

\* (Increasingly present, as we grow in our salvation.)

### HOW THEN DOES SCRIPTURE PRESENT MIRACLES TO US?

- ✓ They are normally described as "having happened" (past tense). They aren't commanded!
- ✓ In the case of Mark 16:17, we read that they would occur (future tense), as the apostles went about proclaiming the Good News. (We see this being fulfilled in Acts.)
- ✓ In Acts 4, we read that the apostles (and those with them) prayed for miraculous signs to occur (when they told others about Jesus).
- ✓ The Corinthians were rebuked for having a wrong focus on such things (1 Corinthians 12-14).
- ✓ Most (if not all) were done for a purpose that was far greater than the miracle itself.

## SO WHERE SHOULD OUR FOCUS BE?



WE SHOULD FOCUS ON THE THINGS THAT SCRIPTURE SAYS  
ARE TO BE PRESENT WHEN THE SPIRIT IS PRESENT.

THESE ARE **MORE IMPORTANT!**

✓ Godly character traits.

✓ Love for God and neighbor.

✓ Gifts for building each other up.



WE CAN LEAVE THE OPTIONAL THINGS, SUCH AS MIRACLES,  
FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO DECIDE ON.

[It may be OK to ask for something miraculous to be done, but we must be willing to accept whatever answer (yes/no) he may give us.]

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