

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES

THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES The Reason Jesus Healed

In New Testament times, miracles had a distinct purpose, as stated and shown in various ways in the Word.

Jesus said, "The works which the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness to me that the Father has sent me" (John 10:25). See also John 10:38; 14:10, 11.

A DEMONSTRATION

A very clear example is given in Mark 2. When the paralytic was let down through the roof for Jesus to heal him, Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Scribes who were in the crowded house thought Jesus was blaspheming in claiming to forgive sins.

Jesus answered their thoughts: "Why do you reason these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Your sins are forgiven, or to say, Arise, take up your bed and walk? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins, (he said to the sick of the palsy) I say unto you, Arise, take up your bed and go to your house." And he did!

MIRACLES CONFIRM

The book of Hebrews reports that this great salvation, "having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will."

John regularly called Jesus' miracles "signs." In the 21 chapters of his gospel account, he refers to them as "signs" 14 time. As Nicodemus saw, and as Jesus said, they were signs that God was with Jesus and was doing His works in Him. Peter preached on Pentecost that Jesus was "approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

When the apostles worked miracles in Jesus' name, they gave evidence that Jesus was at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33), evidence of the power of His name (Acts 3:16), evidence that God was with them and their message was from God (Acts 13:9-12). Their miracles gave boldness and strength to the few witnesses faced by overwhelming opposition (Acts 4:29, 30).

They gave proof that the Gentiles were to be accepted in Christ through obedience to the gospel, the same as the Jews (Acts 10:9-16, 44-47; 11:15-17; 15:8, 9, 12). This was proof, even to the elders and the church at Jerusalem, that the preaching of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles was according to God's will (Acts 15:12-22).

SPECIAL STUDIES

The great miracles of God, wrought through the apostles and some on whom they laid their hands, were so clear and so certain that even sorcerers and people who practiced magical arts saw the proof of real truth and gave up their superstitions and trickery (Acts 8:6-14; 19:11-20).

MIRACLES WERE NOT ALWAYS FOR COMPASSION

The miracles of the Bible taught God's power and authority, sometimes His love and goodness, sometimes His righteous and fearsome judgments.

Consider the deaths of Uzzah (II Sam. 6:6, 7), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1, 2), and of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11); the leprosy of Gehazi (II Kings 5:27) and of Miriam (Numbers 12:9-14); the blindness of Elymas (Acts 13:8-12) or of the Syrian band (II Kings 6:18-20); the destruction of armies (I Kings 20:30; II Kings 19:35) or of cities (Gen. 19:24, 25; Joshua 6:20).

Although such miracles as healing and feeding people did show the merciful goodness of God and did express the compassion of Jesus, the accounts show that they were not worked merely to relieve suffering.

Physical healing, material blessing, or the prolongation of this earthly life, are not the real purposes of God's grace toward us. He did these things sometimes as visible examples of His power and loving goodness, to encourage faith.

But miracles have always been limited to few and special cases. Never have they been used to relieve suffering or prolong this life for all of God's people impartially. Their benefit was usually temporary and only a demonstration to engender and support an abiding faith.

All who were delivered from sickness or affliction had other times to suffer and to die. All who were raised from the dead had to die again. Once and again Peter was delivered from prison and from persecutors; but another time he was left to die, when God was no less compassionate and Peter was not less believing. So it was also with Paul.

Some received no miraculous deliverance here, but a better resurrection for the life hereafter (Heb. 11:35-40). John the Immerser, greatest of the prophets, worked no miracles, nor was he miraculously delivered from prison and death (Matt. 11:7-11; John 10:41).

Jesus could have healed all the sick or raised all the dead. But he did not and would not. Many were healed by Paul, but Trophimus and Timothy were not (II Tim. 4:20; I Tim 5:23). A multitude of sick and afflicted lay by the pool at Jerusalem, but Jesus healed only one man (who did not know Him or ask Him to) and then hid Himself from the others. But later He sought the healed man again to teach him and to meet the debate which the Sabbath miracle had aroused with the Pharisees.

Miracles form part of the foundation of our faith, being divine demonstrations witnessing to the origin of the message we have believed. But

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they are not part of the faith or part of its practice in the lives of obedient believers. The miracles wrought by the messengers of God while the faith was being "once for all delivered to the saints" are still effective evidences to establish the truth and authority of that faith.

MODERN MIRACLES

Miracles claimed by preachers today do not clearly confirm the message of ancient apostles and prophets; they seem instead to have the opposite effect. They are not the conclusive and undoubtable kind that established the faith in the beginning. They are claimed by men whose message does not altogether agree with the sure Word of God as given in the Bible.

Even if true miracles were worked today by men who taught the truth of God's word, they would add little or nothing to the proof of that divine revelation. In fact, they would make men tend to depend upon continual miraculous demonstration rather than upon the unchanging power and veracity of God. They would tend also to make men overly eager for physical and material aid instead of concerned for spiritual and eternal salvation.

The spiritual transformation of a sinner through birth of water and the Spirit and the reality of Christ dwelling in him through faith is a greater work than even the mightiest miracles Jesus wrought in Galilee. This is surely what He meant in John 14:12. Compare John 16:7 and Eph. 3:10.