

Doctrine of Miracles

Introduction

1. The age of miracles is not per se over but the gift of miracles has vanished.
2. We must look to the Scriptures for guidance with reference to miracles.
3. Every heart beat in the Devil's world is a miracle, the sick being cured, the baby being born, the Gospel being proclaimed, the Word being taught and many other mundane everyday occurrences are miracles in this the Devil's domain.
4. Should we therefore pray for the extraordinary? Of course, declares the Scripture. We should pray for the extraordinary and the mundane.

Nature of the Miraculous

1. Since the term miracle is popularly applied to unusual events, it is not easy to give the word miracle its true biblical significance.
2. Probably the simplest definition was provided by C.S. Lewis "an interference with nature by supernatural power."
3. J. Gresham Machen in his book, The Christian View of Man said, "A miracle is an event in the external world that is wrought by the immediate power of God,"
4. A miracle occurs when God does something beyond what could be accomplished according to the laws of nature as we understand them, and may be in violation of them.
5. Moreover a miracle is that which is beyond man's intellectual or scientific ability.
6. As a biblical truth our living in the Devil's world is a miracle.

Etymology

1. Four Greek words appear in the Gospels to describe the supernatural works of Jesus:

1.1 **Teras** (translated “wonder/s”) speaks of their extraordinary character;

Joh 4:48 Then said Jesus unto him, except ye see signs and **wonders**, ye will not believe.

Heb 2:4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and **wonders**, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

Mar 13:22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and **wonders**, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.

1.2 **Semeion** (translated “sign/s”) symbolizes heavenly truths and indicates Christ’s immediate connection with a higher spiritual world;

1.2.1 Jesus warned the Scribes they would get no sign except the sign of Jonah.

Mat 16:4 A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a **sign**; and there shall no **sign** be given unto it, but the **sign** of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.

1.2.2 **Semeion** is often used with **Teras**: Mar 13:22

Mar 13:20 And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

Mar 13:21 And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not:

Mar 13:22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew **signs** and **wonders**, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.

1.2.3 In Acts 14:3 we find both **Teras** and **Semeion** used to describe what Paul and Barnabas did.

Acts 14:3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted **signs** and **wonders** to be done by their hands.

1.3 **Dunamis** (“power/s”) can describe an exercise of divine power and demonstrates the fact that higher forces have entered into and are working in this lower world of ours;

Mat 11:20 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty **works** were done, because they repented not:

Mat 11:21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty **works**, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

1.4 **Ergon** (“work/s”) can refer to miraculous deeds which Christ came to do.

Mat 11:2 Now when John had heard in the prison the **works** of Christ, he sent two of his disciples,

Mat 11:3 And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

1.5 The three terms are brought together in Acts 2:22: “Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by **miracles** [*Dunamis*] and **wonders** [*Teras*] and **signs** [*Semeion*], which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.”

The Purpose of Miracles

1. Some tend to view miracles as isolated events in the lives of the prophets or Jesus Christ.

2. Miracles always have a purpose.

2.1 Every event in the life of a believer has a definite purpose and though we may not view it as such, it is a miracle.

3. Miracles were not helter-skelter events.

4. Miracles served to authenticate the message and the messenger of God at critical junctures in the development of the Hebrew/Christian tradition.

5. They also helped preserve the truth of God from extinction.

6. The Bible was written by more than 40 men, in four different languages over a 1600-year period. The writers lived more than 1400 miles apart, and in most cases, were not acquainted with one another. Then tyrants for centuries have tried to destroy and/or discredit it, and yet, it remains the Word of God.

6.1 By all rights the Bible should have been destroyed and yet it is the most accurate book available from antiquity; a miracle!

Old Testament Miracles

1. Moses was a stranger to his people and needed a means to demonstrate that he had been sent by God to lead them from bondage.

2. Moreover, “He needed” a way to persuade Pharaoh to release the enslaved Israelites.

3. And, of course, once God led the Israelites out of Egypt, He had to exercise miraculous power to bring millions of them through the wilderness and into Canaan.

4. Elijah and Elisha ministered to Israel in a day when calf worship and Baal worship threatened to exterminate faith in the true God and their miracles would seem to be purposed to exceed that of Satan’s idols.

4.1 Miraculous acts showed that the message of the prophets was true and worthy of belief, and that their God was the only true God.

4.2 This fact is made especially clear in Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.

1Ki 18:21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

1Ki 18:22 Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men ...

1Ki 18:38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.

1Ki 18:39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.

1Ki 18:40 And Elijah said unto them, Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

4.3 Daniel and his associates were thrust into positions of leadership in a day when the temple and Hebrew political power had been destroyed, and when a large percentage of the leading members of the Hebrew community were exiled in Babylon.

4.3.1 Numerous questions must have rushed through the minds of the exiles:

- Did God any longer exist?
- Was He through with them?
- Were the Assyrians and Babylonians right when they taunted that their gods had greater prowess than the God of the Hebrews?
- Was the Hebrew God a local god able to protect His worshipers only in Palestine?
- Did God have power now that His temple was gone and He had no house in which to dwell?

4.4 The miracles performed in Babylon gave ringing answers to all of these questions.

4.5 The God of heaven was the one true God, universal in His power and loving in His tender watch care over His own.

4.6 He honored the testimony of His faithful servants.

Dan 6:16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions ...

4.6.1 You no doubt remember the King was greatly pleased when he found Daniel had escaped unscathed – a significant miracle which pleased the King and led to Daniel's favorable treatment.

Dan 6:20 And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually ...

4.7 God showed the Babylonians that the image of Nebuchadnezzar was nothing compared to His power.

Dan 3:1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Dan 3:2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Dan 3:12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Dan 3:25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

Dan 3:26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire.

Dan 3:27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

4.8 He struck down Belshazzar at the precise moment he dared to desecrate the holy vessels of the temple and make fun of the Hebrew deity.

Dan 5:1 Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.

Dan 5:2 Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein.

Dan 5:3 Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them.

Dan 5:4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

Dan 5:5 In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.

Dan 5:22 And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this;

Dan 5:23 But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:

Dan 5:24 Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written.

Dan 5:25 And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.

Dan 5:26 This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.

4.8.1 That very night the Medes under Persian leadership took the Kingdom from the Babylonians.

4.9 A people torn from their homeland and their customary worship patterns needed such a demonstration of power to carry them through the days of captivity.

4.10 The fact that the Hebrews were not assimilated into the Mesopotamian population but maintained their distinct nationality is a miracle.

4.11 It is even more remarkable that so many of those people who came to Mesopotamia as prisoners of war and slaves rose to prominence in Babylonian and Persian society.

Dan 2:48 Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

Dan 2:49 Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.

The Miracles of Jesus

1. They had several purposes:

1.1 to demonstrate His Deity and thus to prove that He was sent from God,

1.2 to support His Messiahship,

1.3 to lead His followers to saving faith,

1.4 to help prepare His disciples for the ministry they were to perform.

1.5 and lastly, the miracles of the incarnation, the resurrection, and the ascension are part and parcel of the divine provision of salvation for mankind.

2. After Christ ascended to heaven, His disciples began to preach in His name, to interpret the events of His life and His death, and to write authoritative messages to their converts. Miracles were used to document the authenticity of their discipleship and message.

2.1 The question of authenticity often arose.

2.2 Were they truly God's messengers, interpreting correctly the message and work of His Son?

2.3 Were their pronouncements to be treated as inspired?

2.4 Miraculous acts helped answer these questions in the affirmative.

The Plausibility of Miracles

1. Men living in the age of science frequently have difficulty accepting the miraculous.
2. Basic to any solution of the problem is an adequate view of God.
3. Once we admit the existence of God, we cannot deny supernatural activity in the space-time universe.
4. God is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, sovereign, righteous, just, eternal life, love, immutable and truth; why would anyone doubt His ability to create miracles?
5. A Jesus Who is merely a martyr for the truth, a prince of philanthropist, a paragon of ethical teachers, could present to mankind only a threadbare idealism.
6. The only answer to the choppy seas of life is a Savior who can say, "Peace, be still."

Mar 4:38 And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?

Mar 4:39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

Mar 4:40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

Mar 4:41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

7. The only hope for victory over Satanic power is through the One whom the demons recognized and obeyed.

Luk 8:30 And Jesus asked him, saying, what is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.

Luk 8:31 And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.

8. The only hope in this life and the next lies in the One who is Lord of life and death.

1Co 15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

1Co 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

1Co 15:23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

9. The only hope for the soul rests in the One who died for our sins and rose again and ever lives to make intercession for us.

What About Miracles Today?

1. The question is often raised as to whether the modern church may enjoy the same power of performing miracles as the early New Testament church did.

2. It must be granted that God is omnipotent and could enable His own to perform miracles today.

3. While it is clear from Scripture and history that God generally and gradually ceased to work through “signs” and “wonders” as the Canon was being completed and distributed, I think we all can agree miracles do occur today.

4. Well authenticated occurrences of the miraculous are seen today.

5. Among tribal people’s miracles seem to abound, perhaps to attest to the message and messenger or perhaps under the auspices of Satan to confound and obfuscate the saving grace of Christ. Many missionaries attest to being challenged by local magic men who can perform miracles.

6. Wycliffe in his Bible Encyclopedia has written:

6.1 “In ... primitive tribes, miracles apparently did not occur after a church had been established. This is not to imply that miracles have not occurred or will not occur ...”

7. In the third world or tribal lands Satan and his demon hordes seem to work overtly. As a result, it does seem that God often answers Satan with overt miracles of His own.

What About the Gift of Miracles? Is There Evidence of Its Gradual Decline

1. There is, first of all, a prophecy “when the perfect comes, then the imperfect shall pass away.”

1Co 13:8 *Agape (the right mental attitude that comes from metabolized doctrine in the soul) never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

1Co 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

1Co 13:10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

1Co 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

2. Also a categorical study of the early temporary gifts gives further documentation that a gradual decline did in fact occur. For example

2.1 Paul, early in his ministry could heal and often did so; the same is true of the other Apostles.

Acts 19:11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul:

Acts 19:12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

2.2 Later the gift had vanished as prophesied by Paul in 1st Corinthian Chapter thirteen.

Phi 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

Phi 2:26 For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.

Phi 2:27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

2Ti 4:20 Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.

2.3 Unger in his book on Tongues speaks of the temporary gifts as having been hissed off the stage when the Canon of Scripture is completed, i.e., “when that which is perfect comes.”

2.3.1 Additionally both Unger and Thieme conclude that Scripture itself seems to indicate a gradual reduction in the use of temporary or whip gifts as the Bible unfolded.

2.4 I early alluded to the fact that after A.D. 58 there was no evidence of whip gifts being extant. By whip gifts I refer to such gifts as tongues, interpretation of tongues, discerning of spirits, healing, the gift of teaching, the gift of wisdom, the gift of prophecy, etc.

2.5 After the writing of 1st and 2nd Corinthians in c. 56 and 57 A.D. respectively, there is no mention of the whip gifts; a significant number of books of the Bible were in fact written and distributed after 1st and 2nd Corinthians. For example, we had: Colossians, Galatians, Philemon, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, 1st and 2nd Peter, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John, Hebrews, Jude and Revelation.

Caveats Concerning Certain Miracles

1. In the Olivet Discourse Christ prophesied that false Christs and false prophets would perform miracles.

Mat 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

2. We must be very careful with reference to analyzing what appears to be a miracle, especially when performed by a “godly man.”

2Co 11:14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

2Co 11:15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

3. The AntiChrist of the Tribulation will be a man of miracles.

2Th 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

2Th 2:9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

2Th 2:10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

2Th 2:11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:

Rev 13:12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Rev 13:13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,

Rev 13:14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

Non-Christian Sources of Miraculous Power

1. It was earlier noted that in the end times miracles will be performed by demonic power.

2. Presumably the work of the Egyptian and Babylonian magicians, Simon Magus, and Elymas the sorcerer should be placed in the same category.

Exo 7:11 Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the **Egyptian magicians** also did the same things by their secret arts:

Exo 7:12 Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.

Dan 1:20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the **magicians and enchanters** in his whole kingdom.

Acts 8:9 But there was a certain man, called **Simon**, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

Acts 8:10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

Acts 8:11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries ...

Acts 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

Acts 8:19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

Acts 8:20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

Acts 8:21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

Acts 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Acts 8:24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

2.1 You will recall Simon listened and accepted Christ as his Savior.

Acts 13:6 And when Paul and Barnabas had gone through the isle unto Paphos, found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus:

Acts 13:7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Paul, and desired to hear the word of God.

Acts 13:8 But **Elymas** the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

Acts 13:9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him.

Acts 13:10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

Acts 13:11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

Acts 13:12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Suggestions for the Study of Miracles

1. Miracles are easily passed over as interesting and dramatic phenomena.
2. But a careful investigation will provide information of real value to the Bible student and will contribute to his knowledge of proper methodology in Bible study.
3. Today miracles occur and we are commanded to pray for what we desire and some of these requests may seem miraculous to many but do not let this dissuade you.
4. The question of miracles today

4.1 The question is often raised as to whether the modern church may enjoy the same power of performing miracles as the early New Testament church did.

4.2 It must be granted that God is omnipotent and could enable His own to perform miracles today.

4.3 While it is clear from Scripture and history that God generally and gradually ceased to work through “sign” miracles as the Canon was being completed, miracles do occur today.

4.4 Well authenticated occurrence of miraculous healings have taken place in our world but the gift of miracles has vanished.

Conclusion

1. The miracles performed by Moses and Joshua may easily be found and studied in the Pentateuch and book of Joshua.

2. The works of Elijah are described in 1Kings 17-2Kings 2 and of Elisha in 2Kings chapters two–eight.

3. The miracles of Daniel are recorded in the book of Daniel.

4. The miracles of our Lord are scattered throughout the gospels.

5. Miracles performed by leaders in the early church may be found in the book of Acts, beginning in chapter three and the early epistles to the church.

6. The gospels record 35 separate miracles performed by Christ.

7. Of these Matthew mentions 20; Mark 18, Luke 20 and John 7.

8. It should not be concluded however these are all the miracles of our Lord.

9. Obviously the gospel writers under the leadership of God the Holy Spirit only selected a few.

10. There are many ways of arranging the individual miracles noted in the gospels depending on the purpose of the commentator.

11. In closing let me repeat, since we have no idea of the source of miracles, we must not place ourselves in a position of dogmatically asserting a miracle's source as Satanic or Divine but rather our job is to know what the Bible teaches about miracles.