

MIRACLES (10)

Dr. Louis Berkhof observed that the skeptic's biggest objection against miracles was that they violated the normal laws of nature (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 176). However, Dr. J. Oliver Buswell said, "Miracles are not violations of natural law ... they are intelligent acts of a personal God." Natural to us and natural to God are two different things. He went on to say there is no logical problem for God to act in raising a dead person just as there is no logical problem for a man to act in raising his hand (Buswell, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 181-182). We give signs and signals by raising our hands all of the time. We wave "hello" or wave "goodbye" with hand signals. Just as we do this by raising our hand, God can give His sign or signal by raising one who is dead. God's signs are far beyond and above our signs. Supernatural miracles are not about what is normal and natural for us, but what is normal and natural for God.

It is perfectly natural for God to create something that is so stupendous that we still can't figure it out thousands of years later (i.e. body, brain). God can act well within what is natural for Him when He decides to reverse gravity for He made gravity. What is natural to Him is way out of our natural realm. A miracle is not a violation of His natural cause and effect laws; it is simply some new effect He causes by His supernatural means. To argue from our miniscule perspective what God is or is not capable of doing is very foolish.

What is actually needed to prove that a miracle has really taken place is good, reliable, and credible eye-witnesses. The Bible is filled with such witnesses and some of them were heathens, not believers: 1) Acts 3:1-4:22 (3:4, 6-10; 4:1, 5-6, 16); 2) Acts 14:8-23 (14:8-13); 3) Acts 16:25-29. But in all reality, the greatest witness to miracles is a God who cannot possibly lie (Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2).

Ada Habershon really gets at the heart of the matter of those who deny miracles when she said that **those who try to explain away the miraculous are just trying to live life by "leaving out God"** (*The Study of The Miracles*, p. 6).

The Apostle Paul warned Timothy of the existence of a worldly, false scientific knowledge that existed in his day (I Timothy 6:20) and would intensify as the Church Age wound down (II Timothy 4:3). He told Timothy to "guard" the truth and "avoid" the pseudo-intellectuals. Any who disbelieve miracles disbelieve the Bible. They do not have a developed intellect, but a deformed intellect. True science based on true scientific fact will always lead to God. Dr. Habershon said it is important that as we learn more of science, we also learn more about the God about whose work science speaks (*Ibid.*, p. 9). A true scientist who understands the normal laws of nature ought to be the first to testify and defend the miraculous that God has done that has gone far beyond those normal laws.

QUESTION #7 – What are the main time zones of the "signs" and "wonders" miracles?

With the exception of the Church Epistles and the seven churches of Revelation, there are "signs" and "wonders" miracles scattered throughout the entire Bible. Dr. Herbert Lockyer has done a good job of tracking all of this in his book "*All The Miracles Of The Bible.*"

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However, as we carefully search the Scriptures to systematically catalogue these miracles, we discover that **the vast majority of the “signs and wonders” miracles occur in four main Biblical time zones:**

Time Zone #1 - The time zone of Moses and Joshua (1400 B.C.).

This is the time zone that began the O.T. Law. Israel was in slavery and had forgotten about God.

Thirty of the O.T. miracles occur during this period. In this particular time zone are the plagues and miracles of the Exodus and the miracles surrounding Israel leaving Egypt and entering the Promised Land. The obvious purpose of the miracles was to show Israel and the rest of the world that God was with Israel and that God had not forgotten about her.

Time Zone #2 - The time zone of Elijah and Elisha (850 B.C.).

This was the age of the prophets and Israel’s apostasy. The miracles done by the prophets prove that miracles are not a sign of spirituality, for Israel was given over to idolatrous compromise, including the worship of Baal. Twenty-three of the O.T. miracles occur during this time zone. There was a long period of spiritual decline after Joshua, during the days of the Judges, until the time of David and Solomon. During this time miracles were far and few between. Then the Israelites fell into terrible idolatry, so God raised up two key prophets to call Israel back to Him.

God used Elijah and Elisha and their “signs and wonders” miracles to bring the nation back and restore true worship. Dr. Buswell observed that from the time of Elijah and Elisha until the time of Christ and the Apostles, “miracles were very few” (*A Systematic Theology of Christian Religion*, p. 178).

Time Zone #3 - The time zone of Jesus and His apostles (A.D. 30-60).

Here is the greatest epoch time of miracles in all of history. Truth is we don’t even know how many miracles Jesus actually did (John 20:30). A minimum of 59 of the miracles of the Bible occur during this time zone. Jesus was presenting Himself as Israel’s Messiah and then His apostles were presenting truth that said God’s program had moved out from Israel to the Gentile world. The “signs & wonders” miracles were critical in establishing the truth of all of this. In fact, the Church Age sign of languages (“tongues”) said to an unbelieving Israel that God’s program was swinging out to Gentile nations.

Time Zone #4 - The time zone of the Great Tribulation (Future).

During the Great Tribulation “signs and wonders” miracles will dominate the entire seven years. There will be seven seal judgments which feature seven trumpet and seven bowl judgments that unleash a barrage of the miraculous. God will authorize Satan and his Antichrist and demons to do miraculous things during this time as well. It is no coincidence that one of the key focal points of God during the Tribulation will be the nation Israel (i.e. Revelation 7:4-8).

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Just imagine what seeing a miracle like the one described in Revelation 6:14 would be like. Apparently, by use of the preposition “from” or “out of” (εκ) God will literally pick up mountains and islands and move them to a different place. People looking in the sky and seeing this will say to those mountains “fall on us” (Revelation 6:16). This is just one of multiple miracles that will occur during the Great Tribulation.

QUESTION #8 – Is it Biblically permissible to believe that the “signs” and “wonders” miracles have ceased at the present time in the Church Age of Grace?

We believe it is not only permissible to believe this, but it is the “only” right thing to believe if one honestly looks at Scripture and “rightly divides” it. We do know from Scripture that when God’s program has developed to a certain level, certain things are no longer necessary. For example, in the O.T., God displayed His glory by a “cloud.” However, once things progressed in His program, that “cloud” display was no longer necessary. We may determine the same is true presently during the Grace Age. Naturally, the apostle who is closely connected to “the times of the Gentiles” dispensation age of Grace is the Apostle Paul.

When we track Paul’s ministry, from Acts 13, we come to a key “pivotal” passage - Acts 18:6-7. This is the first time in Paul’s ministry that he left a synagogue voluntarily. Prior to this, he was forced out. At this point, Paul’s witness to Israel is about to conclude. Dr. M. R. DeHaan observed, “As the transition from Judaism to Christianity and from law to grace progresses, special miracles, signs and wonders gradually diminish (these were Kingdom signs committed to the apostles during the apostolic age) until they disappear entirely. After the completion of the New Testament the need for verifications of the Gospel by signs, wonders and miracles are no more needed” (M. R. DeHaan, *Pentecost and After*, p. 145). We may prove this by offering a series of Biblical and Pauline evidences.

Evidence #1 - The last known miracle that we know Paul did was to heal Publius and some others on the island of Malta prior to going to Rome (Acts 28:8-10). (**A.D. 59-60**)

Now there is something significant to contextually realize here that would indicate “signs” and “wonders” miracles were just about done. The reason why Paul and his group went to the island of Malta was because of a shipwreck (Acts 27:14ff). The way they actually physically got onto the island was anything but miraculous, they got there by swimming, grabbing planks or anything else that floated (Acts 27:43-44). If we recall that Jesus spoke to a storm and it obeyed Him, we see that Paul had prayed, but this was no “sign” and “wonder” miraculous rescue.

They did all live, but via normal means of survival. One would have thought a good miracle would have been to speak to the storm and have it calm down and then all get out and walk on water to shore. But the days of the spectacular and miraculous were just about done.

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As far as Paul's final miracle is concerned—God was directing Paul to Rome (Acts 27:24) and was not about to let Paul die by a snakebite before he got there (Acts 28:3-5). We may notice that the immediate response of the people who saw this was that Paul “was a god” (Acts 28:6). Paul used his final miracles to show he was a man of God, but not God. By doing these miracles, Paul was able to witness to the natives and to those taking him to Rome. The final record of Paul's miracles established his credentials as an apostle in a new region of the world.

Evidence #2 - We know that Paul eventually ended up living in a dungeon without a coat prior to

his execution and didn't do the miraculous (II Timothy 4:13). (AD 67)

The reason why both Peter and Paul were arrested and executed is because they were the big names of Christianity and Nero was on a rampage to persecute Christians. He set Rome on fire in A.D. 64 and blamed the Christians. One would think this would be the ideal setting for Paul to demand that Nero let God's people, the Christians, alone, as Moses had done for Israel. This would have been a great place for another series of plagues against the Roman Empire, until Nero stopped hurting God's people. However, no such appeal occurred. Why? Why didn't Paul demand he be let go and God's people be let go or else? Because the days of the “signs” and “wonders” miracles were over.

Evidence #3 - Paul could not heal those closest to him, which proves miracles were not possible

for those who knew Paul was an apostle of God.

As we just saw in Acts 28, Paul could heal people and yet there were many close to him he could not heal:

- 1) He could not heal Epaphroditus - Philippians 2:25-30 (A.D. 60-61)
- 2) He could not heal Timothy - I Timothy 5:23 (A.D. 64)
- 3) He could not heal Trophimus - II Timothy 4:20 (A.D. 67-68)
- 4) He could not heal himself - II Corinthians 12:7-9 (A.D. 55); Galatians 4:13-14 (A.D. 48-49)

Evidence #4 - When Paul was in jail in Rome and he never expected an angel to get him out.

Paul was in jail on many occasions and once while in Philippi, on his second missionary journey (A.D. 49-50), God did the miraculous and Paul could have escaped—Acts 16:25-28. However, when he was in prison the first time in Rome, he had the people in Philippi pray that he might be released—Philippians 1:19 (A.D. 61). When he was in prison the second time in Rome (A.D. 67), he knew he was not going to be released, but would be killed (II Timothy 4:6-7).

Now why didn't Paul expect a miracle to be performed to get him out of prison, like had happened on his first trip to Philippi over ten years earlier? Because the days of the “signs and wonders” miracles were over.

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Evidence #7 - When Peter and Paul were executed, the Apostle John did not raise them up from the dead.

In the Bible there are nine miraculous resurrections:

- 1) Elijah raises the widow's son (I Kings 17:17-24);
- 2) Elisha raises the Shunammite's son (II Kings 4:20-37);
- 3) Elisha's dead body raises another dead man (II Kings 13:20-21);
- 4) Jesus raises a widow's son in Nain (Luke 7:11-17);
- 5) Jesus raises Jairus' daughter in Capernaum (Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-44; Luke 8:41-48);
- 6) Jesus raises Lazarus in Bethany (John 11:38-44);
- 7) The Godhead raises Jesus (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20);
- 8) Peter raises Dorcas (Acts 9:17, 18);
- 9) Paul raises Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12).

Now John was the last living Apostle. He lived 40 years longer than Peter or Paul. In fact, he ended up in an important Pauline city, Ephesus. One would think, with the terrible persecution being aimed at Christians that a good thing for him to do would be to raise up Peter and Paul to make a statement for God and to stabilize things. This would have been a tremendous "sign and wonder" miracle that would say - you cannot stamp out Christianity. Why didn't John do this? Because he couldn't. The times of the "signs and wonders" miracles were gone.

This is why people who lie to a church today don't drop dead. This is why people who get bit by a deadly serpent must go to a doctor or face death. This is why people who go to jail, don't have angels bust them out. The days of the "signs and wonders" miracles are done.

QUESTION #9 – Do "signs and wonders" miracles occur during the present Grace Age?

To this question we state a dogmatic and emphatic **NO** ! There is only one "sign and wonder" miracle left to occur in this dispensation and when it does occur it will signal to the entire world that the Church Age is over and a new dispensational program has just begun. The one and only "sign and wonder" miracle left to occur is the Rapture , which will include a massive resurrection of all those who died "in Christ" (I Thessalonians 4:16-17).

There are a couple of key observations we want to make about life in the present dispensation:

Observation #1 - "Signs and wonders" miracles are contrary to a faith that pleases God.

A God honoring life in the Grace Age is one of faith, without which it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Furthermore, **the kind of faith that pleases God, according to the Apostle Paul, is one that walks by faith and not by sight in the miraculous (II Corinthians 5:7)**. Furthermore, Jesus, Himself, taught that the truly blessed person was one who believed, not having seen the spectacular (John 20:29). A "signs and wonders" miraculous Grace Age is contrary to a solid faith walk with God that truly does please Him.