

Does God Work Miracles Today?

Chuck Northrop

Because of “the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 12:31), any study that concerns the Holy Spirit must be approached in all seriousness. Also, because lives are at stake, both spiritually and physically, a study of miracles must be approached with objective reason and not subjective emotions.

Sometimes people use the term “miracle” to refer to phenomena. They will say something like, “the miracle of birth” or “life is a miracle.” However, true miracles are extraordinary events that surpass natural forces. They are supernatural in character and transcend human knowledge and experience. Though birth and life are phenomenal, they are ordinary events that occur every day. Unlike the ordinary, when Jesus and His apostles healed, there were no need for doctors, medicine, and hospitals. Also, the need for convalescence was nonexistent for the miracles were immediate, and those healed were made completely whole. Furthermore, there were no failures (Acts 19:13-18; Matthew 4:23; 9:35) which demonstrate God’s power over nature, disease, demons, material things, and death.

The purpose of the miracles of the New Testament was twofold. First, they were for confirmation. They confirmed who Jesus was (Acts 2:22), and they confirmed that His and His apostles’ message was from God (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4). Second, they were done to cause belief in Jesus. John wrote, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30-31). Notice these ideas are closely related. By confirming who Jesus is and from where the apostles received their message, the miracles lead to belief in Jesus as the Son of God.

Though miracles benefited individuals, their actual purpose was not for any individual’s physical benefit. Often they were motivated by compassion (Matthew 14:14), and yet their primary purpose was for confirmation. God could have shown compassion in a number of ways without miracles. He can providentially work through medical professionals or new discoveries or nutrition. This is brought out by the fact that there were great men of faith such as Paul who were not healed (2 Corinthians 12:7-10), and there were miracles

clearly not for the benefit of the recipient (Acts 5:1-10; 13:9-12). Would Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, be benefited when he was brought back to physical life (John 11)? He would have been in paradise and then brought back to this world of woes! His resurrection was not for his benefit, but it confirmed Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Since God confirmed His word through miracles, signs, and wonders, then He does not need to reconfirm it to this generation. In fact, through His word, He has provided for us all things that pertain unto life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), and His word will furnish us completely unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Paul wrote when the “perfect” comes, the “in part” will be done away (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). In this passage, the “perfect” is contrasted to the “in part.” The “in part” is named as tongues, knowledge and prophesy — all having to do with revelation. The “perfect” or the mature, then must be the completed revelation of God. When God completed His revelation to man, the “in part” would “fail,” “cease,” and “vanish away.” To drive this home, Paul used three illustrations of growing to maturity — the child becoming a man, from a mirror to “face to face,” and partly known to fully known. Now here is the point: Since we have the complete revelation of God, then we no longer need the “in part,” that is, the miracles used to confirm the word.

Miraculous power was passed on by the laying on of the apostles’ hands. In Acts 8:18, when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, the Holy Spirit was given, he offered the apostles money to purchase this power. Simon recognized an important fact: Only the apostles could pass on the miraculous gift of the Spirit of God. This is an important concept in our study. Since no one today could possibly qualify as an apostle of Jesus (Acts 1:21-22), then no one today could possibly have the power to do miracles. That power ceased with the death of the apostles.

As stated, this topic is an emotional one. We can choose to believe personal phenomenal experiences, or we can believe the Bible. The Bible’s testimony is clear — miracles confirmed the word, were prophesied to cease, and ended with the death of the apostles.