

Let's Study Miracles

by Bryan Gibson

The Book of Acts is filled with miracles, so let's use it to make the following nine observations about miracles.

1. **Miracles, wonders, signs**—these are the different words used to describe miraculous activity (2:22, 43; 4:16, 22, 30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12; 19:11). Acts 2:22 uses all three of them: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by **miracles, wonders, and signs** which God did through Him in your midst...” **Miracle** comes from the Greek word *dunamis*, and means force or power (think dynamite, which is derived from the same Greek word). **Sign** is used, because a miracle signifies something; it makes something clear or obvious. In the passage cited above, the miracles of Jesus signified (made it clear) that He was the Son of God. And **wonder** is used, because a miracle is anything but natural. You don't use the word wonder to describe some ordinary event, or something that could have a natural explanation.

2. The power these miracle workers exhibited was far superior to the power Simon claimed to have (8:9-13), or that which people claim to have today. Words like “**notable**” (4:16), “**evident**” (obvious) (4:16), “**great**” (6:8), and “**unusual**” (19:11) are used to describe the various miracles, signs, and wonders they performed. Know anyone today who can raise the dead (9:36-43), strike someone blind (13:8-12), and heal everyone brought to him, and do so immediately (3:7; 5:16; 9:34; 28:9)? We've seen people **hold** poisonous snakes, but do you know anyone who has been **bitten** and suffered no harm, no swelling or anything (Acts 28:3-6)? “Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and napkins were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them” (19:11-12). Know any man or woman who possesses that kind of power today?

3. So indisputable were these miracles that even the enemies of the gospel could not deny them. Acts 3 describes a man who was “lame from his mother's womb” (3:2), which was hardly a secret, because he was “laid daily at the gate of the temple called Beautiful” (3:2). Here's the record of his healing: “Then Peter said, ‘...In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.’ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God” (3:6-8). The reaction of the Jewish authorities? “Seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, **they could say nothing against it**...that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem and **we cannot deny it**” (4:14, 16). If such a miracle were performed today, not even the worst skeptics could keep a lid on it. News outlets all over the world would be covering it, and Twitter, Facebook, and every other form of social media would be absolutely blowing up. That's the defining feature of the miracles found in the Book of Acts

and elsewhere in the Bible—so clear, so obvious, so spectacular, that no other plausible explanation could be offered.

4. The people who performed these miracles, signs, and wonders did so by the power of the Holy Spirit. The apostles spoke in tongues (languages) “as the **Spirit** gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Cornelius and his household also spoke in tongues—after they had “received the **Holy Spirit**” (Acts 10:44-48). Jesus performed many miracles, because He was “anointed...with the **Holy Spirit** and with power” (Acts 10:38). Some men in Ephesus “spoke with tongues and prophesied,” but again, it was after “the **Holy Spirit** came upon them” (Acts 19:6). And these passages certainly harmonize with other New Testament passages—like Romans 15:19 (“in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the **Spirit of God**”), and Galatians 3:5 (“He who supplies the **Spirit** to you and works miracles among you”).

5. This power, however, did not come from the Holy Spirit alone. These miracles were actually a unified effort from each person in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Look carefully at this prayer from the apostles: “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they make speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30). They’re praying to the Father, asking Him to stretch out His hand—asking Him to grant them the power to do signs and wonders in the name of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, then, did not act independently of the Father, and Jesus was involved too, because these miracles were performed in His name (or by His authority). “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk” (Acts 3:6). “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” (Acts 16:18). Performing miracles, though, involved more than just calling on the name of Jesus, a point which some folks learned the hard way. In an effort to cast out an evil spirit, they used the **name** of Jesus, but they lacked His **authority**. BIG mistake, because here’s what happened: “And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’ Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (read the full account in Acts 19:13-17).

6. Because these miracles were performed by the power of the Holy Spirit, one had to receive the Holy Spirit—with miraculous effects—before he or she could perform them. We use the phrase, “with miraculous effects,” because there is a sense in which every Christian receives the Holy Spirit, including the Christians we read about in the Book of Acts. Only certain ones, though, performed miracles, so we must make a distinction between the manner in which every Christian receives the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 4:6-7; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:21-22), and those who received it with miraculous effects. The apostles received the Holy Spirit when they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised them it would happen (John 14-16; Acts 1:4, 8), and it did happen (note the miraculous effect—“and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues”—Acts 2:4). Interestingly enough, for a period of time (up until Acts 6), the apostles were the only ones who performed miracles (Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12).

7. Others received the Holy Spirit—with miraculous effects—when the apostles laid their hands on them. The first two non-apostles to perform miracles were Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Philip (Acts 8:6). Earlier, the apostles laid hands on each of these men (Acts 6:6), and the significance of that is clearly explained in two passages: (1) Acts 8:18: “when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given”; (2) Acts 19:6: “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”

8. Cornelius and his household—they were the lone exception; they were the only other ones who received the Holy Spirit without the laying on of the apostles’ hands. They too were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and it certainly had miraculous effects (Acts 10:44-48). That this was a highly unusual event can be seen in Peter’s words when he recounted what happened: “And as I began to speak the Holy Spirit fell upon them, **as upon us as the beginning**” (Acts 11:15). To describe this unique event, Peter had to go back to the time when the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit (“at the beginning”). So this was not a regular occurrence; in fact what happened here had a very special purpose: to convince the Jews that God made no distinction between them and the Gentiles, to show that the Gentiles could be saved through Jesus Christ—without having to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses (Acts 11:17-18; 15:5-11).

9. These miracles, signs, and wonders had two very clear purposes—in some cases to **reveal** God’s word (e.g. prophesying), and then in other cases, to **confirm** God’s word, to confirm that what was spoken was indeed the truth, that it came from God. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and we know that’s true, because He was “attested by God...by miracles, wonders, and signs” (Acts 2:22). “And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (Acts 8:6). “Therefore they (Paul and Barnabas) stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Acts 14:3). And these passages are in perfect harmony with what is taught elsewhere about the purpose of miracles (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4; 1 Kings 17:24). What’s interesting, and further confirms the point we’re making is that miracles were not performed when what was taught could be validated by the Scriptures (Acts 17:1-4, 11), nor were they performed when some point had already been revealed and confirmed (Acts 15:12).

Based then, on the nine observations above, here’s the all-important question: Do men and women today have the power to perform miracles? **First**, have you seen any, or heard any reports of any being performed? We’re talking about clear, indisputable miracles—ones like we referenced earlier from the Book of Acts. As pointed out previously, miracles such as these could not be hidden—news like this would travel the world in practically an instant. **Secondly**, the promise made to the apostles—“You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5)—anyone promised that today? As noted before, the only other folks who were baptized with the Holy Spirit were Cornelius and his household, and that had a unique, one time only purpose. **Thirdly**, anyone today had the apostles lay hands on them? Of course not, because they’ve all been dead for nearly 2000 years. Remember, this was the only other way people could receive the Holy Spirit, with miraculous effects. **Fourthly**, hasn’t the word of

God been fully revealed and confirmed? (John 16:13; Ephesians 3:1-5; 2 Peter 1:3; Jude 1:3). Remember, the purpose of these miracles was to either reveal or confirm God's word. If that has been accomplished, then why would any man or woman need to perform them today? You don't need a miraculous revelation today to preach the truth, because it's all there in the Scriptures. And to confirm whether or not someone is preaching the truth today, you just compare it to what the Scriptures say. This full and complete revelation—isn't that what Paul was looking toward when he spoke this prophecy: "Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).