

Rise Up And Build

"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18

February 7, 202`

Bible Miracles — Have They Ceased?

According to Webster, a miracle is defined as “an event or effect in the physical world that deviates from the known laws of nature.” From a biblical perspective, a miracle would be an event in the physical world, brought about by God’s intervention, or by God interrupting or transcending the laws of nature. For example, by the known laws of nature, we cannot explain Jesus walking on water (Matt. 14:25), nor can we explain an ax head floating on water (2 Kings 6:4-7). In order for these miracles to occur there had to be an act of God to interrupt or to transcend the laws of nature in order to make possible that which was otherwise impossible. Of course, God’s right to intervene or transcend the laws of nature is not to be questioned. Surely the **Maker** of a law has the right to change or modify a law which he has made. God is the Author of both natural and spiritual law, so He surely has the right to change or alter those laws.

We acknowledge that many religious groups claim that God is still performing miracles today, and that He is using them as His human instrumentality. However, this should raise certain questions in the minds of thoughtful people. For example, why would God miraculously authenticate two preachers who represent two religions which teach **opposing** doctrines? Would that not be tantamount to God fighting against God?

In asking “have miracles ceased,” we are not asking “have miracles ever occurred?” I do not for one moment question whether God miraculously created Adam from the dust of the earth (Gen. 2:7). Nor do I question whether God created Eve from a rib taken from Adam’s side (Gen. 2:21-23). But I do ask, “Is God continuing to miraculously create full grown men from ‘*the dust of the ground,*’ and does He continue to create full grown women from ribs taken from the sides of men?” The fact that God’s “*understanding is infinite*” (Ps.147:5), and that God is “*Almighty*” (Gen. 17:1) necessarily infers that God **could** still create men and women in the same way He created Adam and Eve. For that matter, God could (if He wanted to) grow watermelons on pecan trees, but I deny that He does grow watermelons on pecan trees!

From what has been said it should be evident that this writer does not deny the actual occurrence of a single miracle recorded in the Bible. Nor is this writer questioning the great power of God. But this writer is asking, “Have Bible miracles ceased?” Of course, **if** they have not ceased, **then** they continue to be performed today even as they were in Bible days.

However, before answering the question, “Have Bible miracles ceased,” it is important that we observe a few facts about the miracles which are described in the Bible.

Bible Miracles Were Manifested in Five Areas

1. Over Nature. On one occasion Jesus was sleeping in a boat, and “*suddenly a great tempest arose on the sea. Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing.’ Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm*” (Matt. 8:24-26). I have no doubt that the winds and the sea really did obey Jesus. But I deny that the winds and the sea are obeying people today!

2. Over disease. “*And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people*” (Matt. 4:23). “*Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed*” (Acts 5:16). Today it is different. Miracle workers (?) of today don’t deal with “*all kinds of diseases,*” and they have many failures. They don’t touch withered limbs, amputated legs, or other physical afflictions which are obvious to the naked eye.

3. Over Unclean Spirits. Jesus “*cast out the spirits with a word*” (Matt. 8:16). The apostle Paul cast “*a spirit of divination*” from a certain slave girl (Acts 16:16-18). I affirm that, based upon Bible teaching, people today are not demon-possessed, and that if this is true, then no one can cast **out** of a person that which is not **in** that person! However, for those who claim that people are demon-possessed and that they are God’s instruments for casting out demons, then in the words of an evil spirit who witnessed similar fraudulent efforts in the first century, I am inclined to say, “*Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?*” (Acts 19:11-15).

4. Over material objects. With five loaves and two fish, Jesus fed “*about five thousand men, besides women and children*” (Matt. 14:16-21), and “*they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained.*” If the same God is still enabling people to perform the same miracles today as in the past, then why don’t a few modern miracle workers go to some of the third world countries, pray over their meager food supply, and feed the multitudes of hungry souls?

5. Over life itself. Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44), Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-41). Others were raised from the dead. The great miracle workers (?) of today attend funerals — even of their closest loved ones — but how many are raising people from the dead?

Characteristics of Bible Miracles

1. They were instant. To the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, one who had “an infirmity thirty-eight years, Jesus said “*Rise, take up your bed and walk. And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed and walked*” (John 5:5-9). There was no waiting around for the person to gradually improve; his cure was immediate!

2. They were complete. To a lame man at the gate of the temple, Peter said “*in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk*” (Acts 3:6). In the next chapter we learn that he was “*made whole*” (Acts 4:9). He was not almost cured; he was completely cured!

3. They were undeniable. Concerning the healing of the lame man at the temple, even the enemies of Peter and John said, “*What shall we do to these men? For indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it*” (Acts 4:16). But miracles (?) of today are easily denied — even by those who want to believe they are happening!

4. Various conditions prevailed. Sometimes faith was present; sometimes it was not present. Sometimes they were performed because of the faith of the people performing the miracle. But now-a-days, after a failure is obvious, the common retort concerning the people still affected is “they didn’t have enough faith” — thereby adding insult to injury.

5. They were always successful. A case in point illustrating this statement is recorded in Acts 5:15,16: “*So they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.*”

Miracles Have Ceased!

Because of having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), the apostles were able to work miracles, and they often worked miracles, and by which the Lord confirmed “*the word through the accompanying signs*” (Mark 16:19; cf. Heb. 2:3,4). However, Holy Spirit baptism was a promise made to certain people (Acts 1:5), and as a promise it was fulfilled. Now there is “*one baptism*” (Eph. 4:5), it being baptism in “*water*” (Acts 8:36,38), and it is “*for the remission of sins*” (Acts 2:38). Others, upon whom the apostles laid hands (Acts 8:18), received “*spiritual gifts*” (I Cor. 12:1), which included “*the working of miracles*” (I Cor. 12:10). However, according to I Corinthians 13:8-10, these miraculous or spiritual gifts were to cease upon the completion of the word of God. And, inasmuch as the apostles were guided into “*all truth*” (John 16:13), then divine revelation was complete by the time the last apostle died. Inasmuch as no apostles are around to impart miraculous gifts through the laying on of hands, and inasmuch as divine revelation is complete (and the purpose of miracles has been served), then we deny that people today are able to perform miracles. Could this be why Oral Roberts built a hospital and staffed it with doctors and nurses?

—B. Witherington

From **Truth Magazine**, Oct. 3, 2002