

Five Great Periods of Miraculous Activity in the Bible

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

A. Removing an illusion:

1. We often think that miracles occurred often and continuously throughout the Old and New Testament scriptures. It was not that neatly arranged.
 - a. In reality, they were few and clustered together.
 - b. Relatively few people ever witnessed a miracle.
2. God created everything by miracle, but He chose to sustain it by law.
 - a. He would need a good reason to suspend natural law.
 - b. Purposes that support and glorify His plans are that reason.
3. Similarly, with inspiration:
 - a. We tend to think that when the scriptures were written, God inspired the prophets, and they sat down with parchment and quill and wrote it right away. It was not that orderly of a process.
 - b. 2Peter 1:12-21 - They spoke as they were moved; the writing came much later.
4. Studying these matters should not shake our faith, but rather reinforce it as we are amazed at the power and providence of God in penning and preserving it.

B. We tend to over-represent the number of miracles in the Bible. While, there are many miracles; but more often than not, we read of long stretches of history when no miracles occurred.

1. The miracles tend to cluster around short, special periods, most notably the period of Exodus from Egypt and the period around Jesus' life. These are also, incidentally, periods that changed world history.
2. Even in the periods of miracles, they aren't as plentiful or magnificent as they could be. They're rather spare and austere.
3. God parted the Red Sea and gave the Israelites daily manna from heaven, but He didn't flood them with feasts or build jeweled cities.
4. Likewise, Jesus fed the five thousand bread and fish, but not a sumptuous feast. God seems to give His people just enough miracle to get by and no more.
5. According to the Biblical account, the only remarkable thing Jesus does as a child is to display wisdom in the temple at age 12. Notable, but not overtly miraculous

C. The long stretches without miracles and the austerity of those that occur lend credibility to the miracles in the Bible. In the context of the whole Bible, they stand out like beautiful gems.

1. We appreciate them more because they are rare. And although some people say the Bible is a fairytale, if you read it straight through, it's much more a story of suffering, punctuated on occasion by the limited, but quite evident, presence of God. It's an account of people who most of the time can't seem to stay faithful to God and cannot seem to grasp the meaning of a miracle right in front of them. If the Bible writers were going to make it up, you think they'd come up with something more entertaining.

I. BIBLE MIRACLES

- A. The word "miracle" plainly means a spectacular event, or an event, that triggers wonder. In Biblical usage, the word 'miracle' is limited to less than the conventional meaning of the word. A miracle is described in these ways:
 - 1. An extraordinary event, unfathomable in conditions of natural forces
 - 2. An occurrence that causes the witnesses to assume a phenomenal personal origin
 - 3. An occasion that represents a proof (a sign) of consequences that are much broader than the occasion itself.
- B. Miracles are to be differentiated from the kind of answers to prayer, which do not comprise 'signs,' or expressive evidence for the unbeliever.
 - 1. What Christians know as miracles are not purely works of chance or answers to prayer. They comprise a demonstrative result such as when Elijah prayed for fire on the altar of Jehovah. God answered him with a demonstrative miracle convicting the priests of Baal that there was only one God.
 - 2. Works of magic are not of God, and miracles performed by the hand of God should be characterized as works of God not magic.
 - a. Magic consists of nothing more than a wonder with a predetermined method, which causes the magical result. The power of the wonder worker is controlled simply by the skill of the worker and can be accomplished by anyone taking the time to learn the method used - Ex. 7:8-12
 - b. The divine will of God is the dependent source of miracles. The one doing the miracle is nothing more than the servant of God.
 - 3. Miracles are also confused at times with the works of Satanic or demonic origin and should be distinguished from them. Christ warned against this type of miracle - Matt. 24:24
 - 4. The word "miracle" in contemporary English is used to mean something quite different than miracle in the Bible. "It was a miracle!"
- C. There are events in nature, which cause one to wonder or marvel, and these should be distinguished from miracles of God. These events in nature are simply oddities of natural phenomena. True miracles of God always teach a lesson and give a definite 'sign', demonstration of God's truth to believers and non-believers alike.

I. MAJOR PERIODS OF MIRACLES

- A. Most of the miracles recorded in the Bible can be placed into five periods, with a few brief occasions of lesser miracles
 - 1. The Creation and on a lesser basis with Abraham
 - 2. The time of Moses and the Exodus, and Joshua and the conquest; establishment of Jewish nation - 1400 BC
 - a. Lesser basis with Judges and early Kings
 - 3. The time of Elijah and Elisha; struggle with idolatry during period of the kings, beginning 850 BC
 - 4. The time of Daniel and Minor Prophets; captivity around 600 BC

5. The time of Jesus and the apostles
- B. These are to be distinguished from periods of inspiration and revelation, which also appear to be limited and periodic (to be studied in lesson: Bible Writers).
- C. Creation
 1. Overwhelming exhibition of power
 2. Very little witnessed by humankind
 3. Effects to be appreciated by humankind later
- D. The time of Moses and the Exodus, and Joshua and the conquest
 1. The burning bush
 2. The ten plagues of Egypt
 3. The parting of the Red Sea
 4. The crossing of the Jordan
 5. The fall of Jericho
 6. The battle of Gibeon
 7. Numerous other miracles between the parting of the Red Sea and Crossing of Jordan
- E. Following the second period of miracles there was a long period under the judges when godly faith was revitalized under the rule of David and Solomon. It was during this time that miracles were few.
 1. A period of idolatrous worship led to the third great period of miracles, centered on the work of Elisha and Elijah.
- F. The time of Daniel and the writing prophets, the fourth great period of miracles
 1. The miracle of Jonah
 2. The miracles in the time of Isaiah - 2Kings 19:35, 20:9-11
 3. The miracles in the book of Daniel
- G. Perhaps the greatest time of miracles happened during the time of Christ in His ministry and that of His apostles during the early days of the church.
 1. Healing of the leper (Matthew 8)
 2. The centurion's servant (Matthew 8)
 3. The healing of the wife's mother (Matthew 8)
 4. Calming of the sea (Matthew 8)
 5. The casting of the devils into the swine (Matthew 8)
 6. A woman with an issue of blood (Matthew 9)
 7. The blind men healed (Matthew 9)
 8. A man with the withered hand (Matthew 12)
 9. The feeding of the multitude (Matthew 14)
 10. Walking on water (Matthew 14)
 11. A child vexed with a devil (Matthew 15)
 12. A great catch of fish (Luke 5)
 13. The lame man made whole (John 5)
 14. The blind man healed (John 9)
 15. Water into wine (John 2)
 16. Miracles of the apostles (Acts 9; 13; 19; 1Cor. 12; Gal. 3; Heb. 2)
 17. Miracles of the disciples - tongues, prophecy, interpretation, etc.
 18. There were close to 40 miracles of demonstrative nature performed by Christ recorded in the Gospels alone - John 20:30

- H. Great periods of miracles followed times of great spiritual need
1. During the time of the Exodus, God's people had forgotten His name.
 2. Through the course of the ministry of Elisha and Elijah, the people converted to Baal and Molech.
 3. In the time of Daniel and Minor Prophets, God's people were in exile and in danger of being absorbed into the oblivion in Babylon
 4. In the time of Christ, self-righteousness, hypocritical attitudes, and religious corruption were rampant. But primarily, it was the time of the change of covenants

II. MIRACLES HAD A PURPOSE

- A. They are for edification and revelation - John 20:31; 1Kings 18:30-39
- B. They are to confirm God as the ultimate source of all things.
1. No known system of laws or science can give answer to the workings of miracles by God - John 4:48; Acts 2:19; 2Cor. 12:12
- C. Miracles introduce periods of Divine revelation
1. Moses and Joshua: the time of the giving of the Law.
 2. Elijah, Elisha, major and minor prophets: introduced the prophetic office, the prophetic age, and the books of prophecy
 3. Christ and apostles introduced the era of the New Testament revelation of the new covenant.

III. DURATION OF MIRACULOUS PERIODS

- A. None of those periods lasted much more than a hundred years.
1. Each period experienced a proliferation of miracles unheard of at other times in God's redemptive history.
 2. But even during those times, miracles were not just normal everyday occurrences that happened to anybody and everybody. The miracles that did happen in the time of Moses and Joshua--involved Moses and Joshua. The miracles that happened in the time of Elijah and Elisha, happened around the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. And the miracles that happened to Christ and the Apostles and through them, happened through their ministries.
 3. Miracles were not happening everywhere to all people. And aside from those five intervals, the only other miracles recorded in Scripture are very isolated events.
 - a. The Lord miraculously defeated Sennacherib's army, then healed Hezekiah, and turned the Sun's shadow back (2Kings 19-20).
 4. Miracles didn't happen to God's people in the normal course of life.
 - a. While God can at any time can inject Himself into the human events supernaturally, but He chooses to limit Himself.
 - b. The rest of the time, God works through providence or in response to prayer by providence or established natural law.
 - c. He doesn't need to accomplish His will through miracles; they are for our benefit, not His

- d. God does not need to do miracles for every Christian every day to prove His love.
- e. He does not need to do miracles every day to convince people that He exists.
- f. He only needed to authenticate the Word for our benefit, and when the authenticated Word was fully revealed there is no longer any need any longer for authenticating miracles.

IV. ARE MIRACLES NECESSARY TODAY?

- A. When the Old and New Testaments were completed, God's revelation was finished. Through many signs and wonders He has authenticated the veracity of this Book. Anybody who humbly and honestly reads it can see that it's true.
1. Does God have to keep doing miracles? Is there a need for ongoing miracles to authenticate the Bible? Does weak faith require a miracle to remedy it? Does God do miracles on demand? Are the phenomena that are occurring today, hailed as "signs and wonders and healings," really necessary and authentic? The answer to all of these questions is no.
 2. As you read the Book of Acts and you will get to the part in the book where you say: "I haven't read a miracle in a long time," and you'll finish the whole book and never see another one. They had begun to cease even in the Book of Acts.
 3. Charismatics believe that miraculous gifts were given for the edification of believers. God's Word does not teach this.
 4. B. B. Warfield writing in 1918, said: "Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to 'revelation periods' and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers declaring His gracious purpose. Their abundant display, in the Apostolic Church, is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic Age in revelation... Between 36 A.D. and 95 A.D., all 27 books of the New Testament were written. And so there was a proliferation of authentication because of the vast volume of literature being revealed in a brief period of time. When this revelation period closed the period of 'Miracle Working' had passed by also as a mere matter of course. God the Holy Spirit has made it His subsequent work, not to introduce new and unneeded revelations into the world, but to diffuse this one complete revelation through the world and to bring mankind into the saving knowledge of it."
 5. Abraham Kiper, Dutch theologian, writes in 1898: "It has not been God's way to communicate to each and every man a separate store of divine knowledge of his own, to meet his separate needs. But He rather has spread a common board for all, and invites all to come and partake of the richness of the great feast. He [God] has spread a common board for all, and invites all to come and partake of the richness of the great feast. He has given to the world one organically complete revelation, adapted to all, sufficient for all, provided for all, and from this one completed revelation he requires each to draw his whole spiritual sustenance. Therefore, it is that the miraculous working which is but the sign of God's revealing power cannot be expected to continue, and in point of fact, does not continue after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been completed." - 1Peter 1:7-9

MODERN MIRACLE WORKERS OR PIOUS PRETENDERS?

I. WHAT ARE MODERN DAY MIRACLE WORKERS FAILING TO DO?

- A. John 14:12 - Must be able to do every miracle that Christ did, and more.
 - 1. Works of nature - John 6 - calm storm, walk on water.
 - 2. Control elements - water to wine, feed 5000 with a lad's lunch (send them to areas of drought and starvation).
 - 3. Control demons and madness - Gadarene man; sons of Sceva.
 - 4. Read minds - Matt. 9 - Palsied man, scribes thought he blasphemed.
 - 5. Cure all diseases - Mongolism, cancer, cerebral palsy, leprosy, paraplegics, limbless, AIDS, etc.
 - 6. Prophecy - A true prophet meets the requirements of Deut. 13:1-3;
 - a. Speaks consistent with what has been said - Four Oaks, woman pastor, guitars and drums.
 - b. Deut. 18:20-22 - Speaks and it does not come to pass.
 - 7. Raise the dead - Luke 7:15, widow's son; John 11 - Lazarus.
- B. Jesus said they would do the same or greater; we are still waiting.

II. WHAT ARE MODERN DAY MIRACLE WORKERS DOING?

- A. Making excuses:
 - 1. "You don't have enough faith."
 - a. 2/3 of the miracles in the New Testament had nothing to do with faith on the part of the recipient.
 - b. How much faith did the water have to be changed to wine?
 - c. Christ said the faith was to be in the worker, not the recipient.
 - d. Mark 16:17 - believer's faith.
 - e. Matt. 17:20 - "Faith to move mountains"
 - 2. "You don't have enough spirit; you are weak in the Lord."
 - a. 1Cor. 3:1-3 - Corinth was weak, carnal, babes, fed with milk, and they still performed genuine miracles.
- B. Getting the cart before the horse.
 - 1. John 10:37-38 - Jesus used the miracles to prove the word; MDMW use the Word to try to prove their miracles.

III. WHAT ARE MODERN DAY MIRACLE WORKERS FORGETTING?

- A. The purpose of miracles
 - 1. Confirm the deity of Christ - John 20:30-31.
 - 2. Confirm the teaching of the word - Mark 16:17-20; Heb. 2:2-4.
- B. Not every one received a gift or even the same gift - 1Cor. 12:29-30.
 - 1. Modern tongue speakers believe you must get a miraculous gift from the Spirit or you are a second class citizen in the Kingdom.
- C. Tongues aren't the best gift, 1Cor. 12, yet that's the one they all want.
- D. Every tongue speaker must have an interpreter or he is to keep silent
 - 1. 1Cor. 14:27 - speak one at a time, too.
- E. Tongues are a sign for unbelievers, not to confirm salvation - 1Cor. 14:22.
- F. Is God redundant that He needs to re-confirm that which has been proven?

IV. WHAT ARE MODERN DAY MIRACLE WORKERS DOING TO THEMSELVES?

- A. Gal. 1:7-9 – Bringing themselves under a curse.
- B. 2Tim. 3:8-9 - Making fools of themselves.
- C. Burning themselves out religiously.

V. HAVE MODERN DAY MIRACLE WORKERS PERFORMED ANY MIRACLES?

- A. They have followed no New Testament authority or examples in their performance; and a performance is what it is.
- B. Miracles have ceased - 1Cor. 13:8-10 (elaborate).
 - 1. Zech. 13:1-3
- C. Transmission of gifts was by apostles alone.
 - 1. Rom. 1:11
 - 2. Acts 8:14-18 - apostles sent to impart gifts; Samaritans did not receive them automatically.
 - 3. When the apostles go, so do the gifts.
- D. There was never any doubt over New Testament miracles.
 - 1. John 11 - Lazarus was dead four days and walked from the tomb.
 - 2. Matt. 12 - man with withered hand in presence of skeptical Pharisees.
 - 3. Acts 4:15-16
- E. There is nothing but doubt over modern miracles.
 - 1. Dr. Nolan, In Search of a Miracle
 - 2. They have denied the performance of their miracles to us hard-nosed unbelievers - 2Cor. 12:12