

Chapter 17: Miracles

What are miracles? Can they happen today?

Definition: *A miracle is a less common kind of God's activity in which he arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.*

A) Definition (355): *A miracle is a less common kind of God's activity in which he arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to himself.*

- 1) This definition takes into account our previous understanding of God's providence
→ God preserves, controls, and governs all things.
- 2) Common explanations of definitions of miracles
 - a) A direct intervention of God in the world (assumes Deistic view) (Mat 5:45; Heb 1:3)
 - b) God working without means to bring about the results he wishes
→ It is hard to think of a miracle that came about with no means at all. (Mat 14:15-18)
 - c) An exception to natural law or God acting contrary to the laws of nature.
→ This assumes that God must intervene or "break" these laws for a miracle to occur.
 - d) An event impossible to explain by natural causes.
 - i) It does not include God as the one who brings about the miracle
 - ii) It assumes that God does not use some natural causes when he works in an unusual way
 - iii) It will result in a significant minimizing of actual miracles and an increase in skepticism, since many times when God works in answer to prayer the result is amazing to those who prayed but it is not absolutely impossible to explain by natural causes, especially for a skeptic who simply refuses to see God's hand at work.
 - e) Therefore, a definition where a miracle is simply a *less common* way of God's working in the world seems to be preferable and more consistent with God's providence.
 - f) Biblical terminology
 - i) "Sign" (Heb. **אֵימָנוֹת**; Gk. σημεῖον): something that points to or indicates something else, especially God's activity and power
 - ii) "Wonder" (Heb. **מִוִּפְּתוֹת**; Gk. τέρας): an event that causes people to be amazed or astonished
 - iii) "Miracle" or "mighty work" (Heb. **מַעֲשֵׂי כֹחַ**; Gk. δύναμις): an act displaying great power, especially divine power
 - iv) "Signs and wonders" is often a stock phrase for miracles. (Exo 7:3; Act 4:30; 2Co 12:12)
 - v) God himself is the one who performs "miracles" or "wondrous things." (Exo 15:11; Psa 136:4; Exo 7:12; Exo 8:18-19; 1 Kings 18:17-40)
 - vi) The incarnation of Jesus as God-man and Jesus' resurrection from the dead are the central and most important miracles in all history.
 - vii) But can we consider unusual answers to prayer to be miracles?
A: Apparently so, if they are remarkable enough to arouse people's awe and wonder and cause them to acknowledge God's power at work. (1Ki 18:24; 1Ki 18:36-39; Act 28:8-9)
 - g) We should not ignore it or devise possible "natural causes" to explain them away.

B) Miracles as Characteristic of the New Covenant Age (358)

- 1) Jesus' miraculous signs attested that he had come from God (Joh 3:2; Joh 2:11; Act 2:22)
- 2) The apostles and others who preached the Gospel performed miracles that amazed people and gave confirmation of the Gospel that was being preached (Act 2:43; Gal 3:5; 1Co 12:28; 1Co 12:10)
- 3) It seems to be characteristic of the NT church that miracles occur (Luk 10:1, 9)
 - a) Miracles were not confined to the seventy disciples, but were characteristic of the churches of Galatia and the New Testament churches generally. (Gal 3:5; 1Co 12:28; 1Co 12:10)
 - b) This may be seen as an indication of the powerful new work of the Holy Spirit that began with Pentecost and may be expected to continue through the church age.

C) The Purposes of Miracles. (359)

- 1) To authenticate the message of the gospel. (Joh 3:2; Heb 2:4)
 - 2) To give evidence that God is truly at work and so serve to advance the gospel (Jo.4:29; Act 8:6-8, 9:35)
 - 3) To bear witness to the fact that the kingdom of God has come (Mat 12:28; Luk 4:18)
 - 4) To help those who are in need (Mat 20:30; Mat 20:34; Mat 14:14)
 - 5) To remove hindrances to people's ministries (Mat 8:15; Phi 2:27; Act 9:40-41; Act 9:36 1Co 12:7)
 - 6) To bring glory to God (Mat 9:8; Joh 9:3)
- D) Were Miracles Restricted to the Apostles? (361)
- 1) An unusual concentration of miracles in the Apostles' ministry (Act 5:12-16; Act 19:11-12)
→Nevertheless, this does not prove that *no* miracles were performed by others (1Co 12:10; Gal 3:5)
 - 2) What are the "signs of an apostle" in 2 Corinthians 12:12? (361)
 - a) The contrast is not between apostles who could work miracles and ordinary Christians who could not, but between genuine apostles through whom the Holy Spirit worked and *non-Christian pretenders to the apostolic office* through whom the Holy Spirit did not work at all. (2Co 11:13-15)
 - b) To use this phrase to argue that miracles cannot be done through *Christians* today takes the phrase "signs of an apostle" out of its context and uses it in a way that Paul never intended.
 - c) It is doubtful that "signs of an apostle" refers to miraculous signs (but that they *accompanied* such signs and wonders)
 - d) Miracles were worked by others than apostles (Act 6:8; Act 8:6-7; 1Co 12:28)
 - 3) Norman Geisler's Restrictive Definition of Miracles: "miracles (1) are always successful, (2) are immediate, (3) have no relapses, and (4) give confirmation of God's messenger" (*Signs and Wonders*, pp. 28–30). (366)
-Biblical examples where attempts at miracles failed (Matt. 17:14-21; Phil. 2:27) and where Jesus performed a miracle in stages (Mark 8:24-25).
→Better to conclude that even those whom God gifts with the ability to perform miracles may not be able to perform them whenever they wish. (1 Cor. 12:11).
 - 4) Hebrews 2:3-4 (367)
 - a) "Those who heard him" is not limited to the apostles.
 - b) The message was confirmed not only by "signs and wonders and various miracles" but also by "*gifts of the Holy Spirit.*"
→To argue that this passage limits miracles to the apostles is to argue that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are likewise limited.
 - 5) Conclusion: Were miracles restricted to the Apostles? (368)
 - a) The apostles were the leaders in a new covenant church whose life and message were characterized by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in miraculous ways.
 - b) Furthermore, they set a pattern that the church throughout its history may well seek to imitate, insofar as God the Holy Spirit is pleased to work miracles for the edification of the church.
- E) False Miracles (368) (Exo 7:11; Act 8:9-11; 2Th 2:9-10; Rev 13:11-13)
- 1) The power of God is greater than the power of Satan (Exo 8:19; Act 8:13, 16:18; 2Th 2:10; 1Jo 4:4)
 - 2) The identity of those workers of false miracles is always known through their denial of the gospel.
 - 3) There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that genuine Christians with the Holy Spirit in them will work false miracles. (1Co 12:3)
Should Christians seek miracles today? (369)
 - 4) It is wrong to seek miracles for personal gain. (Act 8:21-22)
 - 5) It is wrong to seek miracles to be entertained. (Luk 23:8)
 - 6) It is wrong for skeptical unbelievers to seek miracles simply to find ground to criticize those who preach the gospel. (Mt 16:1-4)
 - 7) Signs and wisdom do not save people, but the gospel saves people. (1Co 1:22-24)
 - 8) There is nothing inappropriate in seeking miracles for proper purposes (see C above).
 - 9) After Pentecost, the church prayed for boldness to preach the Gospel *and* for God to grant miracles to accompany its preaching. (Act 4:29-30, 9:38; Jam 5:14)