

Magazine

Introduction to the Miracles of the Bible

Part 1: Definitions and Distinctions

Daniel H. King, Sr.

Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III) provided us with the classic definition of a miracle when he wrote that “those things are properly called miracles which are done by divine agency beyond the order commonly observed in nature.” A miracle, is never a mere coincidence no matter how extraordinary or significant. A miracle is a supernaturally (divinely) caused event—an event (ordinarily) different from what would have occurred in the normal (“natural”) course of events. It is a divine overriding of, or interference with, the natural order. As such, it need not be extraordinary, marvelous or significant, and it must be something other than a coincidence, no matter how remarkable—unless the “coincidence” itself is caused by divine intervention (and is, therefore, not really a coincidence at all; cf. for example, Josh. 3:14-17).

Miracles, however, are ordinarily understood to be not just products of divine intervention in the natural order, but extraordinary, marvelous, and significant as well. Thus, Aquinas further explained that a miracle is “beyond the order commonly observed”; and Dr. Eric Mascall commented that the word “miracle” “signifies in Christian theology a striking interposition of divine power by which the operations of the ordinary course of nature are overruled, suspended, or modified” (*Chamber's Encyclopaedia*).

This captures the essence of miracles, because it distinguishes between the miraculous event and the wonderful but merely providential event. In both instances God is ultimately the cause of the happening, but in the case of providence, it could easily be mistaken for “luck” or “good fortune” or even that which is simply “fortuitous.” In the case of the true miracle, however, it could never be mistaken for any of these.

Special Issue — The Miracles of Jesus

Three “Miracle” Words

Three words are found in the Bible to describe a miracle. These terms help to delineate the meaning of a true miracle more precisely. From the human vantage point, a miracle is an unusual event, a “wonder,” that conveys and confirms an unusual message, a “sign,” by means of an unusual force or “power.” From the divine perspective, on the other hand, a miracle is an act of God (“power”), that attracts the attention of the people of God (“wonder”) to the word of God (by a “sign”). Put another way, if we look at the words the New Testament uses for miracles we see the following:

1. A miracle is an act of a supernatural being. The word *dunamis* has the idea of a supernatural power. It speaks primarily of the agent of the act. That power may
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Jesus Turns Water Into Wine

John 2:1-11

Don Wright

The miracles of Christ started out in impressive fashion. Jesus and his new disciples were invited to a marriage in Cana of Galilee to which Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also invited (John 2:1-2). These kinds of wedding feasts lasted up to seven days. It was a week filled with joyous festivities with plenty of food and drink. But on this occasion something went terribly wrong—the wine ran out. Anyone who has ever arranged a wedding and the ensuing reception can immediately sympathize with the family of the bridegroom. To run out of wine on an occasion like this would have been an indelible disgrace to the family, to say nothing of what a humiliating experience it would be for the happy couple getting married.



Kefar Kenna Clay Wedding Jars
Todd Bolen, Pictorial Library of Bible Lands

This is where the story turns from an ordinary incident where a mistake is made to an extraordinary happening where a mistake is rectified by the miraculous powers of Jesus. It begins with Mary informing Jesus that the wine has run out (v. 3). By the response of Jesus, we know that Mary is asking her Son for more than a quick wine run to the local market before the guests notice the problem. She is asking Jesus to solve this dilemma by somehow using his miraculous power. Furthermore, her motive seems to be a desire for Jesus to manifest his glory to the world. Being God and having the ability to read the hearts of men (John 2:24-25), Jesus knew what Mary really wanted. This brings on a mild rebuke from Jesus. “Jesus saith unto her, ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come?’” (v. 4). The rebuke is not seen by the term “woman” which was a term of courteous respect, but by the question, “What have I to do with thee?” Jesus was reminding Mary that he was not just her earthly son; he was her Lord and Savior. He had always been an obedient son so far as their earthly relationship is concerned, but his divine mission was between him and his Father, including the *hour* of his ultimate glorification. In regard to that heavenly

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The Healing of the Nobleman's Son

Bobby Witherington

Now after the two days He departed from there and went to Galilee. For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country. So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things he did in Jerusalem at the feast; for they also had gone to the feast. So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe." The nobleman said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives." So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household. This again is the second sign Jesus did when he had come out of Judea into Galilee.

The Scriptures just cited, John 4:43-54, record the facts regarding the healing of the nobleman's son. This is one of seven miracles cited by the apostle John in which the writer stressed the salient facts of what took place. The other six miracles recorded by John involved turning water into wine (John 2:1-11), the healing of the man "who had an infirmity thirty-eight years" at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15), the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1-14), Jesus walking on the sea (John 6:15-21), the healing of the blind man (John 9), and the raising of Lazarus from the tomb after he had been dead for four days (John 11). Of course, as is cited in John 20:30, 31, Jesus "did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

Much can profitably be said about every miracle Jesus performed, but we shall, for the most part, focus our attention on the actual facts regarding the miraculous healing of the nobleman's son.

However, it is appropriate that some comment be made regarding miracles in general. To the Jews on Pentecost, Peter affirmed that Jesus of Nazareth was "a Man attested by God . . . by miracles, wonders, and signs," which

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God had done “through Him” in their midst (Acts 2:22). “Miracle,” from *dunamis* (Greek), denotes “power, inherent ability, is used of works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means” (*Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Vine). “Signs,” from *semeion* (Greek), is “a word carrying with it a particular reference to the significance of miracles as being seals by which God authenticated the miracle-worker himself (Lockyer). “Wonders,” from *terata* (Greek) “indicates a state of mind produced on the eyewitnesses by the sight of the miracles” (*Ibid.*). Summed up, it might be said that miracles were supernatural works wrought by divine power which deviated from, or transcended, the known laws of nature, which wrought wonderment or amazement to the beholders thereof, and which signified to them that a given person was “a teacher come from God” (cf. John 3:1, 2). The miracles Jesus performed authenticated his claim to be “the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:30) and through “signs and wonders, with various miracles” God bore witness to the divine authenticity of the message proclaimed by the apostles whom Jesus sent forth to preach (Heb. 2:1-4; cf. Mark 16:19, 20). Miracles were divinely intended to last until the completion of the word of God, after which they were to cease, having served their purpose (1 Cor. 13:8-10; cf. John 16:13).

Some people confuse the miracle of the healing of the nobleman’s son (John 4:43-54) with the healing of the Centurion’s servant (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). However, though there is similarity, these are separate miracles entirely. For example, the nobleman was likely a Jew, or at least had Jewish blood, whereas the Centurion was a Gentile. It was the nobleman’s *son* whom Jesus healed, whereas it was the Centurion’s “servant” that “was sick and ready to die” (Luke 7:2). The nobleman’s son had a “fever” (John 4:52), whereas the Centurion’s servant was “paralyzed” (Matt. 8:6). The nobleman implored Jesus “to come down and heal his son” (John 4:47), whereas the Centurion said, “I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof” (Luke 7:6). Other differences could be cited, but this is sufficient to prove that these are separate miracles.

The Time Element

Chronologically speaking, the healing of the nobleman’s servant occurred in the latter part of the first year of our Lord’s public ministry. Jesus’ first miracle occurred in Cana of Galilee where he turned water into wine; it was referred to as the “beginning of signs Jesus did” (John 2:11). Shortly thereafter he went “up to Jerusalem” at the time of the Passover (John 2:13). While in Jerusalem Jesus performed other miracles; hence, “many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did” (John 2:23). After a period of time Jesus went from Jerusalem, the capital “into the land of Judea,” or into the Judean country (John 3:22), and later “left Judea and departed again to Galilee” (John 4:3). It was on this occasion that Jesus and his disciples traveled through

Samaria where he had an encounter with the woman at the well which resulted in her learning his true identity as the “Messiah,” of her telling others about him, and of many of the Samaritans coming to believe “in Him” both because of her word and because of “His own word” (John 4:26, 39-41). Inasmuch as Jesus had gone to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, which occurred at harvest time, and inasmuch as there were yet “four months” until the harvest as Jesus was traveling to Galilee (John 4:35), one would conclude that Jesus had been in Jerusalem and in Judea for about eight months.

His Arrival at Galilee

After spending “two days” in Samaria while enroute to Galilee from Judea, “He departed . . . and went to Galilee,” and “the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast” (John 4:43, 45). In reality, John 4:43 simply resumes the narrative which began at John 4:3 with regards to Jesus going from Judea and departing “to Galilee.” Upon coming to Galilee he was well “received” because the Galileans had seen the things (the miracles) he did in Jerusalem.

One of the persons who had doubtlessly heard of Jesus, and perhaps had seen his mighty works, was “a certain nobleman.” “Nobleman” is from *basilikos* (Greek) which means “royal, belonging to a king”; it is further defined to denote “a courier, one in the service of a king” (Vine). It is quite possible that he was related to Herod Antipas.

The Urgent Request

After Jesus returned again to Galilee, to the region where he had turned water into wine, the nobleman, upon hearing that Jesus “had come out of Judea into Galilee, . . . went to him and implored him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death” (John 4:47). Apparently in an effort to test the man’s faith, Jesus first replied, saying, “unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe,” whereupon the nobleman insisted, saying, “sir come down before my child dies!” (John 4:48-50).

In this case a father, who apparently had position and influence, was desperate for that which position, influence, and money could not buy. His son was dying, and he could not bear that thought! He wanted Jesus to come in haste; as he viewed it time was of the essence!

In reply, Jesus said to the nobleman, “Go your way; your son lives” (John 4:50). Jesus was in Cana, whereas the nobleman’s son was in Capernaum, around twenty to twenty-five miles away. But distance was no barrier to Jesus being able to heal the man’s son.

The nobleman reflected growth in faith. Faith was indicated in the fact that he approached Jesus and urged him to “come down and heal his son.” But at this point he evi-

dently thought Jesus had to be there in person. However, when Jesus said “go your way your son lives,” the man “believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way” (John 4:50). He no longer insisted that Jesus be there in person; he “believed” his “word”! His initial faith has now been made stronger. As he neared his home his servants met him with the good news, “your son lives,” and the nobleman inquired as to “the hour when he got better.” The man said, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him” (John 4:51, 52). It turned out that this was “the same hour in which Jesus said to him, ‘your son lives!’ And he himself believed, and his whole household” (John 4:53). At this point his faith has grown some more, plus the fact that now “his whole household” believed! Of course, this is not surprising, for the miracles Jesus performed were designed to cause all to “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:30).

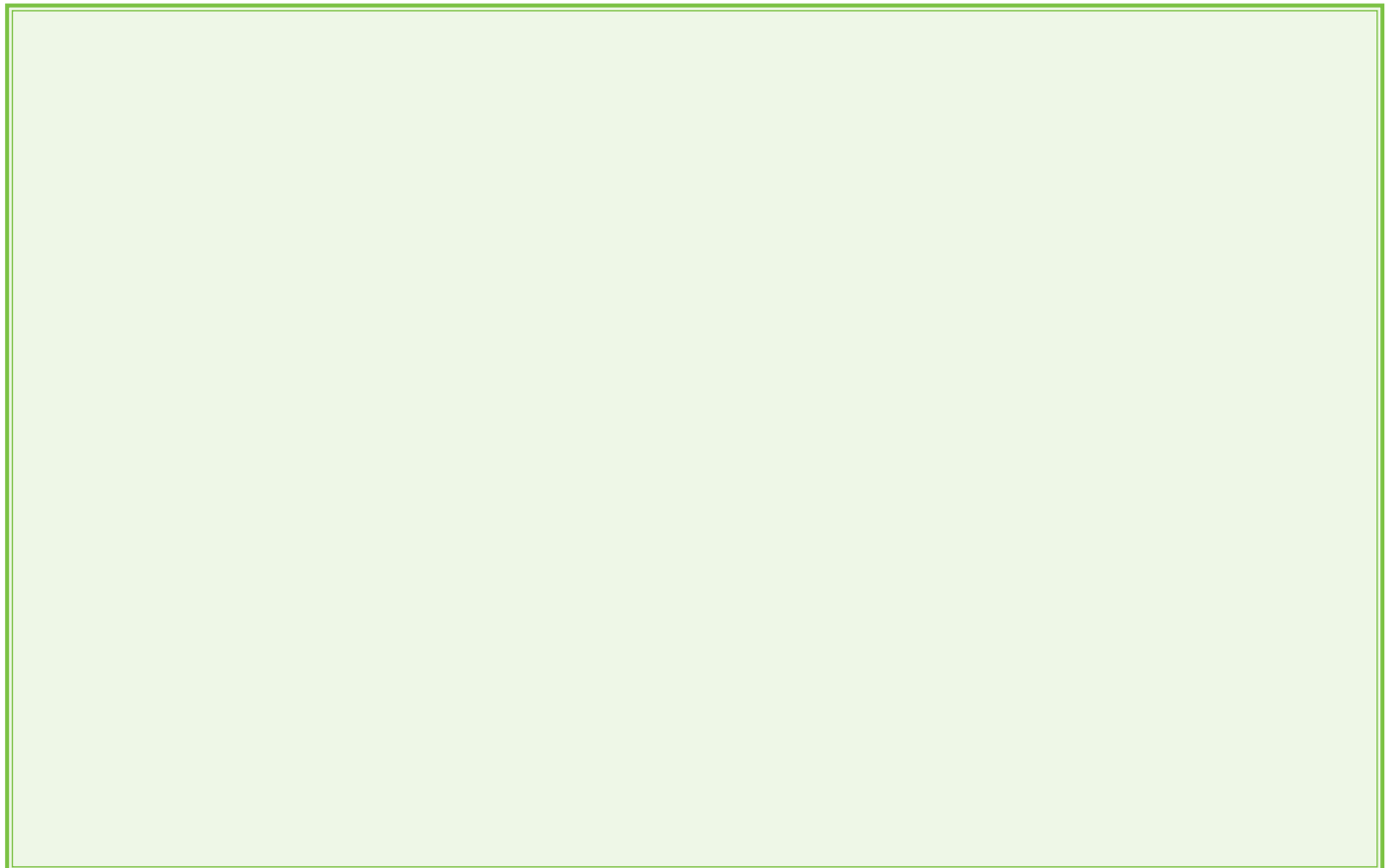
The healing of the nobleman’s son occurred at a distance. It was instantaneous; the son did not begin to improve and gradually return to health. “The fever left him”—all at once! It was miraculous. Moreover, though faith was reflected in the action of the nobleman, faith was not involved on the part of the person who was healed. The son was healed even though he exercised no faith, even though it was not at a big “healing campaign,” even

though it was not preceded by a lot of hoopala, shoutings, testimonials, lively music, nor a “passing of the hat” to collect money for the miracle worker! The miracles of Jesus were genuine; they benefitted the recipients, whereas the “miracle workers” of today are religious charlatans who have gone into the fake healing business because of what *they* can get out of it!

Conclusion

The healing of the nobleman’s son was not the second miracle Jesus performed, for the record mentions other “signs” which Jesus did “in Jerusalem” after leaving Cana (John 2:23). However, this particular miracle was “the second sign Jesus did when he had come out of Judea into Galilee” (John 4:54). Regarding these two miracles in Cana—turning water into wine and healing the nobleman’s son, Lockyer makes these observations: “Is there not a suggestive connection between the two miracles in Cana? The first was associated with a marriage, the second with an anxious home—the first with the joy of a wedding, the second with the sorrow of a family. At the first miracle, Christ added gladness to the feast; at the second He banished sadness from the hearts of many” (*All the Miracles of the Bible* 163).

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Miraculous Draughts of Fishes

Walton Weaver

The two occasions of the miraculous draughts of fishes recorded in the gospel accounts (Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-11) both occurred on the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1), or the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1), more popularly known as the Sea of Galilee. The ancient name Sea of Chinnereth was applied to it in the Old Testament (Num. 34:11). “Gennesaret” refers to a fertile, heavily populated area on the northwest corner of the lake. The city of Capernaum, the home of Peter (Mark 1:21, 29; Luke 4:38, though Peter and his brother Andrew apparently grew up in Bethsaida, John 1:44), was located on the north side of the lake at a distance not far from where the miracle recorded in Luke 5:1 occurred. Tiberias was a city on the west coast of the lake named in honor of Emperor Tiberius by Herod Antipas, who founded the city about A.D. 21. The city was a popular Roman resort, with hot springs just south of the city. The name “Tiberias” for the Sea of Galilee is found only in the gospel of John (John 6:1; 21:1).



Sea of Galilee
Todd Bolen, Pictorial Library of Bible Lands

The Sea of Galilee is almost 700 feet below sea level and in some places is as much as 150 feet deep. It is a relatively small body of water (c. thirteen miles long and six miles wide) lying between two ranges of high hills which makes the waters the subject of sudden swift winds and violent storms. Yet its resting as far as it does below sea level “gives to it an almost tropical climate,” and the fertile soil about it “produced an abundance of grain, fruits, and other foodstuff. The lake swarmed with fish . . . [and] with professional fishermen whose work furnished one of the principal items of the diet of the people” (Hershel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke* 97).

The Word of God

The miracle of the draught of fishes recorded in Luke occurred at a time when Jesus was becoming very popular. Luke begins his report of this miracle by telling us that the multitude

“pressed about Him to hear the word of God” (Luke 5:1, NKJV). This is the first time the words “word of God” appear in the gospel records. They are to be interpreted as a subjective genitive, meaning that they describe the word that comes from God. Luke uses this same expression in Luke 8:11, 21 in the parable of the soils. These same words appear again in Luke 11:28 in Jesus’ response to the loud cry of a woman from the crowd saying, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You.” Jesus answered, “More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” Isn’t

it wonderful to read such reports of the “multitudes” and the “crowds” coming out to hear Jesus teach “the word of God.” Have you ever thought how much more successful our Lord would have been had it not been for the strong opposition of the religious leaders from among the Jews that was to begin in just a short while? It was clearly only “the common people” who “heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37).

The terms “word of God” also appear many times in the book of Acts with the same meaning we have found in Luke (Acts 4:31; 6:2, 7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 44, 46, 48; 16:32; 17:13; 18:11). The “word of God” refers to the gospel message as Acts 8:12, 14 reveals.

“Launch Out . . .”/ “Cast Your Net . . .”

The two miracles recorded in these two passages of Scripture have at least three things in common:

1. **They both reveal the miraculous insight of our Lord to be able to point the disciples to exactly where the large schools of fish were to be found.** In Luke 5 the wording is given in such a way that we must believe that Jesus obviously worked a miracle. He had not simply seen a large school of fish and directed these disciples to it. To direct them to deep water by telling them to “launch out into the deep,” and to know that these fish were at that

particular location at such a distance away, was a miracle of Jesus' knowledge. Peter himself must have recognized it as a miracle by the response we see from him in verse 8. The command to "cast the net on the *right side* of the boat" in John 21:6 is likewise a clear indication that Jesus knew what the disciples did not know. He knew there was a great school of fish on that side of the boat just as he had known it on the other occasion (Luke 5:1-11). There was no guesswork involved in either case.

2. In both instances the disciples had fished all night long without catching any fish. The prompt obedience on the part of the disciples after such a failure is remarkable. It is true that in Luke 5:5 Peter did offer a protest. After fishing all night and having caught nothing, how could they expect to catch something now? Peter would however try once more. Perhaps the answer as to why he would do so lies in his manner of address to Jesus. He calls him "Master," and as Hobbs points out, "the word means one who has the right to command. G. Campbell Morgan gives it the meaning of *epistates* 'Captain, captain of the boat'" (98). He acknowledged Jesus' authority and right to command. At Jesus' word Peter would let down the net, even though he did not expect to catch any fish.

But why would the disciples in John 21 pay any attention when Jesus told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat? In this case they do not seem to have recognized Jesus until after the huge catch of fish (v. 7). There does not seem to be a satisfactory answer except that it must have been either a matter of hope on their part, or possibly even a case of tired resignation. There is no indication that they obeyed for the same high reason that they had so promptly obeyed in the former instance.

3. Both times these disciples caught an enormous amount of fish. Luke says that when the disciples had let down their nets as Jesus had commanded "they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking" (Luke 5:6). The size of the catch was so large that it took all of the disciples to handle them, and they "filled both boats, so that they began to sink" (v. 7). In John 21 they caught so many fish that "they were not able to draw it [the net] in because of the multitude of fish" (v. 6).

4. There are also notable differences in the two miracles. Note the following:

There was a difference in time. The first miracle took place early in Jesus ministry. The second miracle was on the occasion of the third appearance Jesus made to the disciples following his resurrection.

There was a difference in the size of the catch. The first took both boats to hold them all, and they "filled both boats, so that they began to sink" (Luke 5:7). The second

miracle produced a much smaller number, a total catch of 153 fishes, though this was indeed a large amount of fish to gather in one haul (John 21:6).

There was a difference in when the disciples knew that it was Jesus who was speaking to them. In the story of Luke 5 the disciples knew from the beginning that it was Jesus, but in John 21 the circumstance was quite different. In the latter case Jesus was making an appearance to them following his resurrection from the dead. Though he was standing on the shore when he gave them the command, he did not make himself known unto until after the "multitude of fish" had been caught.

There was a difference in the responses made. We will briefly consider this difference in the following and final section of this study.

The Responses to the Miracles

In describing Peter's response to the mighty miracle of Luke 5:1, Summers aptly says, "Even 'The Rock' (alluding to the name 'rock' that had been given to Peter in John 1:42, ww) had weak knees in the presence of such an event. *He fell down at Jesus' knees* and in humility confessed his sin and his unworthiness to stand in Jesus' presence—*Depart from me*" (*Commentary on Luke* 63). At first one might think that this would not have been possible in a boat. But an article in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (14.5 [1988]: 18-33) tells of a discovery in the Sea of Galilee of a boat twenty-six and a half feet long and seven and a half feet wide dating from Jesus' day.

In the presence of Jesus, Peter, crying out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," responded much like Isaiah when he found himself in the direct presence of God, and the Lord called him to the prophetic office (Isa. 6:5). In both cases the words came naturally from the lips of righteous men who had a sense of their own sinfulness as they confronted the might and majesty of God. In the case of Peter, we have here a vivid reminder of how there were those unique moments in the life of our Lord (while he yet lived among men in the flesh) when ordinary men bowed before him in worship. This means that they acknowledged him to be not only man, but the God-man, "God . . . manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). In other passages the term "God" is used as a christological title: John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; and 2 Peter 1:1. Of these cases the confession of Thomas is perhaps the best known. After he was convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead he cried out, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). In his comments on these words of Thomas, Murray J. Harris says, "In uttering this confessional cry Thomas recognized the lordship of Jesus in the physical and spiritual realm as well as over his own life (*ho kurios mou*—"my Lord," ww) and the essential oneness of Jesus with the Father which made his worship of Jesus legitimate

The Healing of Simon Peter's Mother-in-law

Steve Wallace

Jesus showed sympathy for sufferings in the home a number of times during his earthly ministry. He healed the nobleman's son in John 4 and raised the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-17). We also read of his making a special trip to the house of Jairus where he raised his daughter from the dead (Luke 8:41-42, 49-56).

In Mark 1, we find him in the home of one who would become one of those closest to him among the apostles, Simon Peter. As in the cases noted above, Jesus used his miraculous power to help an afflicted person in Peter's family.

And straightway, when they were come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever; and straightway they tell him of her: and he came and took her by the hand, and raised her up; and the fever left her, and she ministered unto them (vv. 29-31).

This was a day during which Jesus worked many miracles, most of them publicly (vv. 32-34). However, this one was different in that it took place within the confines of a home.

Luke records some things about this woman's sickness that are of note in light of his familiarity with health problems. He writes that she was "*holden with a great fever*" (Luke 4:38). Among his definitions of "*holden*" *Thayer* includes the following: "Of ill's laying hold of one and distressing him" (605). Also, Luke alone relates that it was a "*great fever*." Thus, this was no ordinary cold; this woman was in the grips of a serious sickness and running a temperature.

The disciples that were with Jesus made him aware of her condition. Jesus took her by the hand (Mark) and rebuked the fever (Luke), and she was immediately cured to the point that she was able to minister unto him.

What lessons can be learned from this miracle? Let us first note some that many in our religious world need to learn.

Commonly Held False Beliefs Refuted Herein

1. That Peter was the first pope. Roman Catholics have long held and defended this belief. As such, we should expect Peter to be celibate as the Catholics tell us a pope

(ho theos mou—"my God," ww)" (Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus 129).

In the case of the second miracle in John 21:1, again it is Peter's response that stands out. After John, the beloved disciple, had said, "It is the Lord" (v. 7), Peter "put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea." Peter was so excited upon learning that it was Jesus that had spoken to them that he impetuously swam ashore leaving the other disciples behind struggling to maneuver the boat to land. The distance was about a hundred yards.

The differences in these two disciples, Peter and John, is also beautifully illustrated in this story. Alvah Hovey quotes Chrysostom on this point: "When they recognized the Lord, again do the disciples display the peculiarities of their individual characters. The one, for instance, was more ardent, but the other more elevated; the one more eager, but the other endued with finer perception. On which account John was the first to recognize the Lord, but Peter to come to him" (*Commentary on the Gospel of John* 412).

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must be. However, this is not what we find here. Rather, it comes out incidentally that Peter was a married man. There are a number of things in Bible which negate the idea of Peter being pope, such as the facts that he would not accept worship (Acts 10:25-26) and was not infallible (Gal. 2:11-14). Notable among Bible facts against Peter's being the first pope is the clear indication that he did not live a celibate life.

2. That "faith healers" work miracles today. We first note that Jesus was not like the faith healers of today. Faith healers today rent large auditoriums and advertise their presence, even seeking television audiences. By contrast, the healing of Peter's wife's mother shows that Jesus did not require an audience in order to exert his power. Second, faith healers commonly claim they have "healed" someone when the person has gradually gotten better over a period of days or weeks. Clearly, the miracles of Jesus were much different. Let us note the progression of Matthew's account of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law: "He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto him" (8:15). Imagine if Jesus had touched her hand and then, later in Matthew's account, it was recorded that she had gotten better after a few weeks of rest! Further, we do not read of this disease being incurable; an ordinary physician may have treated it. However, *it was the manner of the cure that sets it apart—a touch of the hand and she's suddenly well again and ready to bustle around the house serving her guests!* The impression made by Jesus' instantaneous cure of the woman is the reason for its being recorded by the inspired writer. There was no question that it was a miraculous occurrence.

3. That work in the home is not degrading to a woman. Jesus' acceptance of this woman's ministering to him stamps his approval on her actions. Other Scripture references do so as well (1 Tim. 5:14; Tit. 2:4-5). The idea that housework is demeaning is like so many other things that we hear in this life: It originated with people who did not care to learn God's counsel on the subject under discussion.

Thus, we see that the account of this miracle, brief as it is, contains some lessons that can help many people see the truth as opposed to error. Beyond these things, what can God's people learn from it?

Lessons We Can Learn From This Account

1. Jesus made the difference. He not only had the power to help, he had a willingness to serve. This is especially seen in the succeeding context where Jesus went on to heal and help many (Mark 1:32-34). His power and willingness to serve are more significant with regards to the spiritual needs of man. He died for our sins and is our advocate with the Father, always there to make intercession for us (Matt. 26:28; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 2:1-2; Heb. 7:25). Further, Jesus was selfless. He was never too tired

to help; the need of others took precedence over whatever his own desires may have been. His selflessness in this account buttresses the testimony of the inspired writer with regards to Christ's readiness and desire to help us spiritually (Heb. 4:14-16). His actions in performing the miracle we are studying and those in its immediate context stand in stark contrast to Christians today who fancy themselves as being too important or too busy to get involved. Another thing that figured in Jesus' actions in this miracle is his compassion. Later in Mark 1, in verse 41, we read of Jesus being "moved with compassion" and healing a leper. Over and over the Bible speaks of Jesus' compassion for those who are in need or suffering (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 20:34; Luke 7:13). This calls to remembrance the words of a text we have already cited herein: "For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). One of the main reasons Jesus made a difference when he visited Simon Peter's house, in all he did during his earthly ministry, and in his ministry today at the Father's right hand is his compassion. Finally, Jesus cares about all men. It did not matter if it was this otherwise unknown woman under consideration in this study, a Roman centurion's servant, or the daughter of a Gentile woman (Matt. 8:5-13; 15:21-28). In light of this truth, it is not surprising to learn of the care he manifests for all men in a spiritual sense (John 3:16; Mark 16:15). We sing the song, "No one ever cared for me like Jesus." Truer words were never spoken—of all men. Jesus made the difference in this account under consideration and he makes the difference today. What should our reaction be to such a gracious inclination toward us on the part of Jesus?

2. We should take our troubles to Jesus. Mark mentions Peter, Andrew, James, and John as Jesus' disciples at the time of this miracle. They had not known Jesus long. However, they had already learned that they should take their troubles to him: "Straightway they tell him of her" (Mark 1:30). This is the essence of Christianity. There are burdens we cannot bear alone, problems larger than we are, etc. As the song we sing says, "Take it to the Lord in prayer" (Ps. 61:1-2). The fact that their troubles were the result of the suffering of someone else brings us to our next point

3. Intercession. Luke wrote, "They besought him for her" (4:38). This healing was done at the request of those around Jesus who had access to him. The word intercession means "to make a petition or intercede on behalf of others" (*Vine* 267, see similar words with very similar definitions on same page). The Bible teaches us that intercession should be a common part of the prayers of God's people (Col. 1:9; 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:25; 1 Tim. 2:1-2). Is it a part of your prayers?

This woman shows by her subsequent actions that there was good reason to heal her. Her sickness had been hindering her from doing what she could for Jesus.

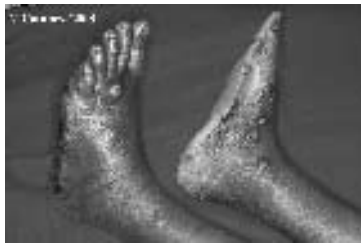
The Cleansing of the Lepers

Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16, 17:11-19)

Brian V. Sullivan

Leprosy As It Is

Leprosy remains, to this day, a hideous, horrifying, flesh-destroying, physically-deforming, insidious disease. From its first mention in the Scriptures (Exodus and Leviticus) it has been set forth as a virtual death-sentence for those who succumb to it, dealing out to them a full measure of social ostracism, public humiliation, repugnancy in the eyes of those whose flesh remains whole, and the constant stares of those who cannot see beyond the veil of flesh to a soul that is crying out for release, relief, and compassion. The leper, by virtue of his affliction can only expect an offering of help from the tenderhearted and even that is offered at a considerable distance to avoid contact with these hurting and helpless humans. To those who have come under its spell, leprosy is a cruel master. Their journey may begin with a simple sore that does not heal properly and spread to encompass a larger portion of their being. Though not evident in its earliest stages, this disease is destroying the tissue below the skin's surface and will ultimately cut off the nerve signals and blood flow resulting in a loss of that



portion of one's body or a grossly altered appearance for the same. To the leper, even the prospect of death seems a viable escape from this corrupted (by disease) flesh that he knows as his body. (For a more complete picture of the nature of this disease, you might consider Exodus 4:6; and Leviticus, chapters 13 and 14; along with other passages listed in an exhaustive concordance.)

Jesus Was Not Here On a Sight-Seeing Mission

As God with us (Immanuel, Matt. 1:23), Jesus knew the very fibers of our being (John 1:3). He knew the “weaknesses” and the “strengths” of all those who pass through this veil of time and flesh. He did not travel through this realm of time on a sight-seeing journey, choosing only the better things to see and the more comfortable

places to stay. He was on a greater mission of helping people understand that he was able to free us from the debilitating effects of sin—sin that we had allowed to take up residence in our hearts, to influence our flesh, and to destroy our eternal well-being (Mark 1:38; 1 John 4:9, 10,

4. “**She ministered to them**” (Mark 1:31). We notice that her first act after being healed was one of grateful ministration to the one who had healed her. With the power he showed by this healing Jesus did not need her to minister to him. She, on the other hand, may have been poor and even illiterate (Acts 4:13), but *she saw what an honor it was to serve Christ in some way* (cf. 2 Chron. 2:5-6; Eph. 3:8). God wants his people to minister in his service today (Acts 6:1-5; 11:29; Rom. 15:25; 2 Cor. 4:1; 8:4; 2 Tim. 4:5; Heb. 6:10). This woman did what she could to serve Christ. He asks no more than this! Are you doing your part (1 Cor. 12:25; Eph. 4:16)?

Conclusion

This brief account of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law teaches many lessons both to correct the erring and exhort the faithful to higher ways. As we consider the service Jesus rendered on this occasion, may we all have a greater appreciation of the service he rendered to all men. He died on the cross for their sins and gave the gospel to instruct us in the forgiveness of sins and in serving him. Further, may all of us who have been healed spiritually recognize the great debt we have to serve him as we wait for his return.

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14; 3:8). The miracles of Jesus were designed to draw our attention to his great power, to strengthen our confidence in him, to encourage our allegiance in faithfully following him, and to demonstrate beyond a doubt that he was the Very One of God, the Master or Lord of all things that impact the sons of men.

The Miracles of Jesus Were Not For Everyone

Yes, we read of numerous passages in the gospel accounts where Jesus healed the many who came to him. However, a closer look at his ministry will reveal that often those who were healed were in the right place at the right time, allowing Jesus to demonstrate his divine power and to open the door for further opportunities to teach. Jesus, on one occasion stated:

But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarepath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:26-27, NKJV).

Of the blind man in John 9, we find Jesus stating, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:3). When he received word of the sickness of his dear friend Lazarus, Jesus lingered longer in the place where he was. He stated: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4, NKJV). In the same fashion, we need to understand that the miracles of Jesus were in a number of select situations and were linked with a furtherance of his greater work of saving man. Contrary to the “faith healers” of our modern day, Jesus did not die to save our flesh but our souls. The ravages of disease, the changes of aging, the consequences of accidents or the harm wrought by ourselves or others upon our bodies of flesh are stark reminders that we are creatures of “corruption” longing for the redemption of our bodies in that last day (Rom. 8:18-23). Even those that Jesus healed or raised from the dead would one day die physically. His was a greater purpose and a greater work than merely that which pertains to the healing of the fleshy bodies of men. Though his miracles may have temporarily released those in physical anguish from their situation, a greater blessing could be found for them in finding in him the mending of their sin-ravaged soul.

Jesus and the Lepers

References to “lepers” and “leprosy” are few in the overall Book of God. In the New Testament, the following references are listed in *Strong’s Concordance*: “Leper: Matthew 8:2, 26:6, Mark 1:40 and 1:43. Under “lepers” we find Matthew 10:8; 11:5; Luke 4:27; 7:22 and 17:12. Under “leprosy” we find Matthew 8:3, Mark 1:42 and

Luke 5:12-13. (Any omissions were unintentional, bvs.) If you view these passages you will soon see that some of them make reference to the work that Jesus equipped and commissioned the apostles to engage in under the “limited commission” (viz. Matt. 10:8). Our interest in this article is in reference to the work of Jesus with lepers (viz. Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45, Luke 5:12-16, and Luke 17:11-19).

It is this writer’s conviction that the first three passages cited (Matt. 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16) are speaking of the same situation, and that the final reference (Luke 17:11-19) may be a different miracle. We would not expect the instructions regarding their compliance with the necessary elements of the law of Moses to change, because Jesus lived under the Law (Gal. 4:4) and would enforce the regulations of the Law (Lev. 14). Leprosy did not present any insurmountable problems to the divine Son of God, but the healing itself is a demonstration of a greater role and purpose for the Son of God.

Jesus did not pull back with horror when he was approached by this bold outcast of society. To the contrary, Jesus heard him (Matt. 8:2) and responded to this leper’s appeal. He was not only “willing” to heal the man physically, but “put out His hand and touched him” (8:3). It was evident that this man was a leper (Luke 5:12) but his genuine approach to Jesus, his willingness to prostrate himself before Jesus and his imploring Jesus brought him a greater blessing than he might have hoped for. “Immediately” he was cleansed. The plague was gone, the Son of God had spoken the word, extended the blessing and brought forth an instantaneous healing. Any who may have been at hand could have observed the sad state of this outcast of society who came to bow before the Son of God, and could have been filled with wonder at the wondrous power that had made him whole again. The compassionate Christ, the healing Savior, the Lord of all situations had done for him what seemed to be beyond his greatest hopes and expectations. He was healed; yes, he was healed. In each of these three accounts we find that Jesus instructs this healed “leper” to go to see the priest and to follow the necessary procedures (details of this are given in Leviticus 14). Jesus also instructed him to “tell no one” (Matt. 8:4; Mark 1:43-44; Luke 5:14). You have to know that would be the hardest thing for anyone to do. Here is a man who had been granted a stay of execution, a new beginning, a fresh start, a possibility of near-normal living. Wouldn’t you want to tell someone? We know the reason that Jesus was attempting to suppress this was two-fold in nature. First, he was choosing the manner in which he would be revealed as the Son of God (cf. John 2:4; Matt. 17:9). Second, he was not wanting his preaching ministry to be sidelined because of the working of miracles (Mark 1:38). The miracles were to confirm the message of Christ and the identity of the Christ, not to supplant his preaching or distract from his greater mission of saving man from spiritual loss.

Whatever his motives, it appears that things did not go exactly as he had declared. You see, even the most blessed disciple must choose to do Christ's will. Christ will not impose it upon you or commandeer you against your will. Matthew is silent about what this man did (Matt. 8:4). Mark reveals that in spite of Jesus "strictly warning" him, the man "went out and began to proclaim it freely" (Mark 1:43-45). As a result, we find that "Jesus could no longer enter the city, but was outside in deserted places, and they came to Him from every direction" (NKJV). Luke records: "However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by Him of their infirmities" (Luke 5:14-15, NKJV). Jesus had to withdraw to quieter places.

The foregoing healing was associated with Jesus' ministry just after he had come from the mountain (Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7; see Matt. 8:1). Now, consider for just a moment the events of Luke 17:11-19. Here some ten lepers come to Jesus and "stood afar off" (Luke 17:11-12). They cried out for mercy and Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priests (again, abiding by the principles of the Law of Moses, Lev. 14) "and so it was that as they went, they were cleansed" (v. 14). One of them, observing that he was healed, came back and with a loud voice glorified God, fell on his face before Jesus and gave thanks. We are informed that he was a Samaritan. Leprosy apparently lends commonality to a diversity of people, the biases that may have kept the Samaritan and

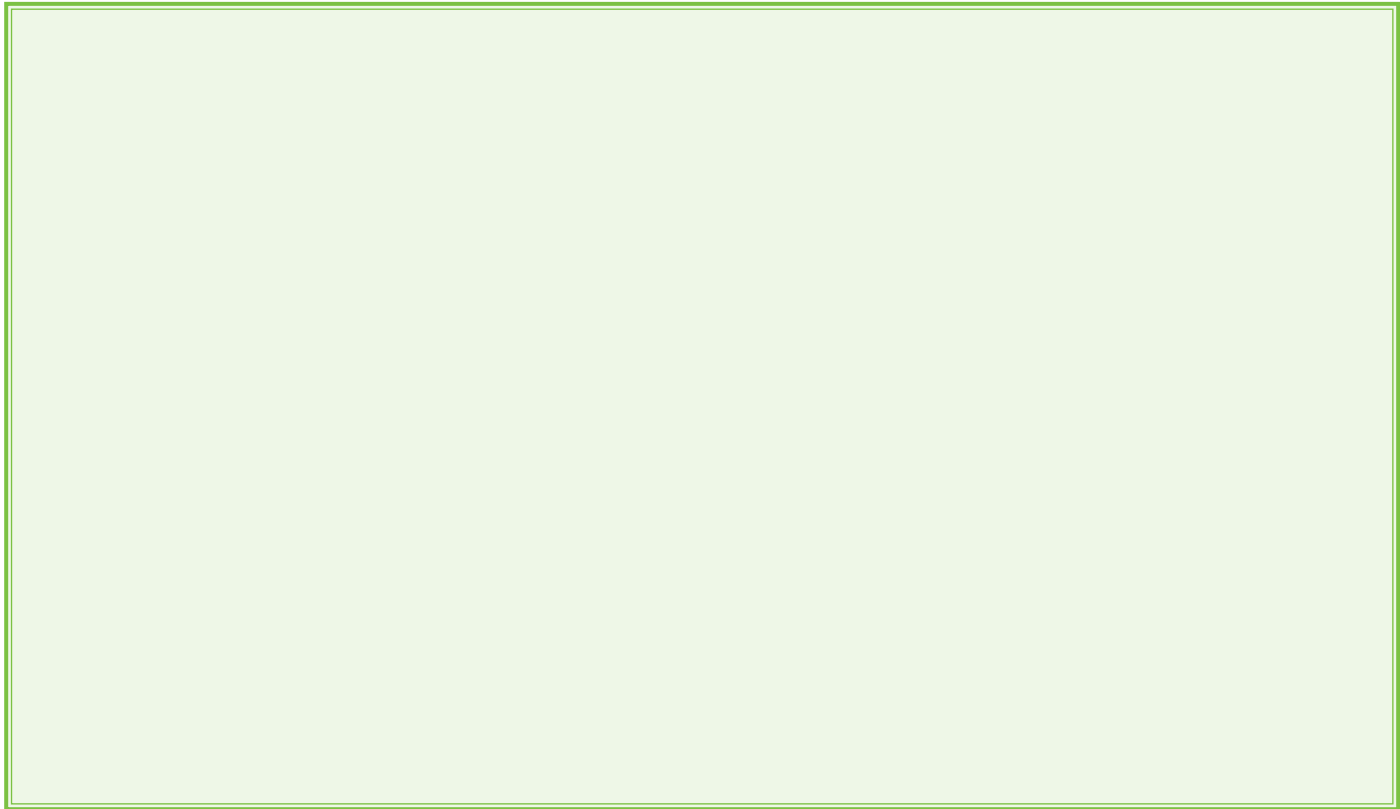
Jew at odds (John 4:9), were not considered in the despair of leprosy. Jesus asks where the others were as he observed that none other than this "foreigner" had returned to "give glory to God" (Luke 17:17-18). The man is told, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you whole" (Luke 17:19). Many a lesson has been developed from this episode in the life of Christ but we will leave that for others. Let us rejoice that the lepers were healed and that the Christ could readily do it.

The Importance of the Miracles

Jesus set forth his works as proof of who he was (John 5:36). John, by inspiration, chose but seven miracles to demonstrate that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30,31). Jesus demonstrates through the healing of the lepers his interest in the hurting, harmed, and despised of this world, his compassion, his willingness to respond to their appeals, his ability to heal all—speak of matters that can bring us hope and expectation. If he could heal the leper (and he did), he can cleanse the sinner who will seek his cleansing power and do his will (and he does, consider 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14). Jesus is the Christ, the Very One of God, our Hope, our Helper, our Savior, and our Lord. Are you willing to do his will, obey his word, and follow him all your days?



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The Healing of the Paralytic

Mark 2:1-12; Matthew 9:2-8; Luke 5:17-26

Jeremy Sweets

Background (Mark 1:14-45)

Jesus' ministry began in Galilee. At a time when Christ's forerunner, John the Baptizer, was silenced by the confines of prison, Jesus began to publicly proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). He called men to follow him and they became his disciples (Mark 1:16-20). He entered into the synagogues and amazed the people with his teaching, speaking as one having authority (Mark 1:21-22). Jesus performed many miracles, casting out demons and healing the sick (Mark 1:23-31). Throngs of people desired the healing hand of the Savior (Mark 1:32-39). They surrounded him and sought his constant company. The news of Jesus spread throughout all of Galilee, causing everyone to seek him (Mark 1:40-44). Even after the mobs forced Jesus into the solitude of the wilderness, the people still sought him (Mark 1:45). The public ministry of Jesus brought a whirlwind of excitement among the people.

The Quest to See Jesus (Mark 2:1-4)

It is in this context that the healing of the paralytic took place. After a period of time in the wilderness, Jesus came back into Capernaum, probably at the home of Peter and Andrew (Mark 1:29). When news of his arrival spread, the crowds surrounded his residence. Despite the lack of limited space, the people came to see Jesus. They packed into the house, leaving no room, not even at the door. In the presence of a captivated audience, Jesus spoke the word of life, the gospel of God, to them.

The large number of people created a problem for those who wanted to see Jesus. The house had reached full capacity, preventing others from entering. Four men, carrying a paralytic or a man with palsy arrived at the house. The exact degree of his disorder is unknown, but it prevented him from being able to walk; he had to be carried. Unable to approach Jesus through normal means, they went up a side staircase to the roof. They first removed the roof, consisting of a top layer of tiles. Then they dug an opening, scooping out a second layer that would have consisted of clay or some similar material (BDAG 352). After they had

made an opening, they lowered the paralytic, along with his pallet, into the presence of Jesus. Their earnest belief that Jesus could heal caused them to traverse a difficult path to the Savior. Like other notables in Scripture, they sought the Lord with persistence, determination, and faith (Matt. 15:21-28; Luke 19:1-10; John 12:20-21).

Jesus' Response (Mark 2:5)

When the paralytic had been lowered to Jesus, he saw the faith of the men and their resolve to gain his audience. He replied in an unexpected manner, stating, "My son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 1:5). The men desired that the paralytic would be healed, but Jesus addressed his greater need, the forgiveness of his sins. Although sickness and death are ultimately results of sin in general, it is not necessary to associate this man's palsy with any specific sin. The text does not indicate that the paralytic's condition was a result of sin. Rather, Jesus provided complete wellness by alleviating the burden of his sins.

Even though it may have appeared that Jesus' actions were disconnected with the need of the moment, they were entirely appropriate. Healing is often associated with forgiveness, both being products of God's hand (2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 103:3). The terms are even used interchangeably at times (Ps. 41:4; Jer. 3:22; Hos. 14:4). Before Jesus healed the paralytic's body, he offered him forgiveness, which is a healing of the soul.

Confrontation With the Scribes (Mark 2:6-7)

Jesus' statement of forgiveness immediately caught the attention of the scribes and Pharisees. They equated his words with blasphemy, reasoning that Jesus had unlawfully taken the prerogative that solely belonged to God. God was the only source of forgiveness and Jesus appeared to pardon sin without authority. The prophets of old announced the forgiveness of God (2 Sam. 12:13), but the scribes understood Jesus to speak on his own initiative, rather than on behalf of the Lord. The scribes would not have necessarily understood that Jesus personally claimed

authority over sins, but that he presumptuously spoke as a false prophet.

Jesus' Response (Mark 2:8-11)

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus spoke to the scribes before the crowd. Keeping with common practice in times of conflict, Jesus addressed the scribes with a question. He questioned their intentions, asking why they reasoned in this manner. Then he asked which is easier to grant: healing or forgiveness? The scribes might have thought that forgiveness would have been an easier statement, since it could not be immediately verified. Jesus challenged the scribes, attempting to cause them to evaluate their basic assumption.

In actuality, forgiveness was more meaningful and therefore more difficult. Healing, for Jesus, was not the end, but a means to an end. Healing can be a visible demonstration of forgiveness (Ps. 41:4; Isa. 19:22; 57:14-21), and Jesus used it precisely in this way. The miracle was performed *so that they would know* that forgiveness had occurred. Jesus intended to draw a connection between the two events. In parables, Jesus used a common physical story to illustrate a deeper, spiritual truth. Miracles often served a similar function. They were clearly visible signs used to illustrate a more important spiritual message. The healings of Jesus show the richness and goodness of salvation from sin.

Jesus not only stated that forgiveness had taken place but that the Son of Man had the authority to forgive sins. The title, Son of Man, is a significant phrase. This was Jesus' favorite way to refer to himself, although others rarely used it. The title in its simplest form simply means a man, and refers to humanity (Num. 23:19; Jer. 50:40). In other words, Jesus stated that a man had authority to forgive sins. The scribes would have perceived Jesus as claiming authority given from God, speaking as a prophet. Jesus' miracle would have convinced them that he was a man of God. He was more than simply a son of man, however. He was *the* Son of Man, God in the flesh, and he personally had authority over sins.

At such an early point in his ministry, Jesus likely used intentionally ambiguous language. It was not his desire that he would be fully revealed to all so soon. He often told others to refrain from spreading news about him (Matt. 9:30; 12:15-16; Mark 3:12; Luke 4:41). Jesus told his mother at the wedding feast in Cana, "My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). It was only after Peter's confession that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, that Jesus began to more fully explain his identity and his mission to his closest disciples (Matt. 16:20-21; Mark 8:30-31). As in the parables, Jesus' teaching would have been intentionally veiled from many people (Matt. 13:10-17).

The Result of the Healing (Mark 2:12)

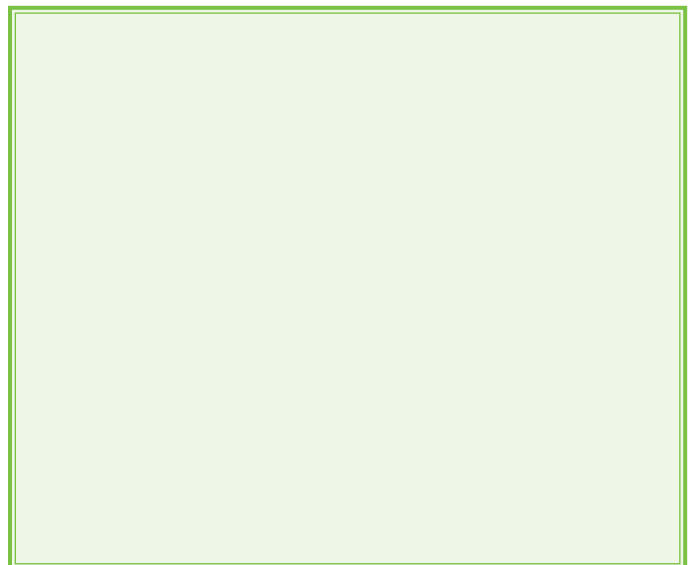
Jesus' actions yielded several consequences. First, he

was met with hostility and controversy. Jesus came as the embodiment of truth, and he was despised and rejected. As long as truth has been proclaimed, it has been opposed (2 Tim. 3:8; 4:2-4). Second, the man was healed. "And he rose and immediately took up the pallet." Jesus gave the men of faith what they sought. A horrible disease that had crippled a man was cured. This miracle took place in the presence of many others. "And [he] went out in the sight of all." Several could see the healing power of the Lord, witnessing a lame man receive the power to walk. Third, such a display of power evoked a response: "So that they were all amazed, and were glorifying God." God's power and goodness had surely been seen and the people returned thanksgiving and praise. The people not only praised God, but responded with fear and amazement (Luke 5:26). An event of this magnitude was not commonplace. The people recognized that a unique event had just occurred stating, "We have never seen anything like this."

Conclusion

The world has never seen a man like Jesus before, and they never will again. He was God in the flesh, and he lived a perfect life as a man (2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). The world he encountered was full of sin, sickness, and disease. It was in desperate need. Jesus felt compassion on the people, healing their sickness and offering hope to the distressed and downcast (Matt. 9:35-36). Ultimately, he would lay down his life, giving a perfect sacrifice for all time that could remedy the shackles of sin. His miracles played an important role in his overall mission. They displayed two of his chief characteristics: his power and his love. Furthermore, they served as pointers to the salvation that could only be found in Christ. We should respond to the miracles just as the witnesses did—with amazement, glorifying God.

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Jesus Heals the Lame Man

John 5:1-18

Harold Tabor

The apostle John uses this phrase “After these things” (also in 3:22; 6:1) to show a transition between events. It is an indefinite time period and not an immediate following of events. There are a number of events from the first Passover (John 2:22-23) that are recorded in both Luke (3:19; 5:33) and John (2:23-4:54).

“**There was a feast of the Jews.**” Moses recorded the commandments of Jehovah saying: “Three times you shall keep a feast unto me in the year” (Exod. 23:14). Several passages describe these three feasts as (1) Passover or the feast of unleavened bread; (2) the feast of harvest or first fruits or weeks (Pentecost) and (3) the Feast of Ingathering or tabernacles (cf. Exod. 23:14-17; 34:18-22; Lev 23:4-34; Deut 16:14-17). There are two other “feasts” that the Jews have added to the calendar since the end of the Old Testament canon. They are the Feast of Lights and the Feast of Purim (Book of Esther).

The first Passover during the ministry of Jesus is found in John 2:12-22 with the first cleansing of the Temple. The next reference to a “feast” is in John 5:1. The second Passover is mentioned in John 6:4. The Feast of Tabernacles is recorded in John 7:2. The Feast of Dedications is recorded in John 10:22 and the final Passover is mentioned in John 13:2. This would give three Passovers or years for the ministry of Jesus.

There is considerable discussion regarding what feast is mentioned in the text of John 5. Since there is no definite article in the best manuscript authorities (and it is unnamed), one can conclude that it would be one of the “feasts” not required by the Law of Moses and likely the feast of Purim. Most commentators suggest the Passover, but this would extend the ministry to four years.

“**In Jerusalem at the sheepgate.**” There is only one other reference to the sheep gate and it is in Nehemiah 3:1 “Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Hammeah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananel.” The location is generally held to be on the eastern wall just north of the temple area. Many writers suggest that this was the gate by which sheep were to enter the city for sacrifices.

“**A pool with five porches**” or cloisters or roofed areas.

It is interesting to note that the remains of the Church of St. Anne include a figure of an angel. Near these remains is what is believed to be the traditional site of Bethesda. There is a “pool” just north of the temple area today. It is quite large and not used today.

Josephus (*Antiquities* Book 15 chapter 5:2 [121-122]) mentioned a great earthquake about seven years into the reign of Herod. It has been purported that this was the beginning when the angel came down to stir these waters.

The pool area (and surrounding buildings) was certainly destroyed in A.D. 70.

In Hebrew, Bethesda means the “house of mercy.” “A multitude of ailing ones” suggests that there was a large crowd of sick people under the shelter of the “porches.” Blind, lame, and withered or paralyzed suggests the variety of illnesses at the pool.

“**A certain man thirty-eight years with this ailment.**”

Each of the seven miracles recorded before the crucifixion by the Apostle John revealed a different aspect of healing. This miracle was a miracle over time. It was a condition



Pool of Bethesda

Todd Bolen, Pictorial Library of Bible Lands

of weakness, with great difficulty moving around for such a long duration.

There was the tradition that an angel went down and troubled or stirred the water. Whosoever was the first to step into the water at the stirring was made whole regardless of their ailments.

The word “moved” does not indicate the exact action. It could have only been a small section that moved like the area of a tub when the stopper is pulled rather than a whirlpool moving the entire body of water as in the “part of the Red Sea.”

Jesus asked, **“Would you become whole?”** Out of the multitude of sickness, this man was chosen to demonstrate the power and authority of the Son of God. There were others who may have been worse off in many ways. There were others whose illness was not as limiting as the lame man. But Jesus knew his heart. The man had wanted to be healed for a long time. But the lame man knew he had two problems. The first problem was: “I have ‘no one’ to put me into the pool.” His condition limited his mobility, with or without crutches. And the second problem was: “while I am coming, another goes down before me.” There were others with illnesses that permitted them to move more quickly and get into the “stirred waters” first.

Jesus gave three commands that imparted strength to the man. Jesus statement was “Arise, take up your mattress (bed) and walk. It was instantaneous and he became completely healthy.

The man heard the commands and immediately obeyed. The result was he became “whole,” cured, or normal.

“It was a Sabbath on that day.” Twice more in the Gospel of John (7:22-23; 9:14-16), Jesus causes a controversy over his “works” on the Sabbath day. This healing on the Sabbath day in Jerusalem demonstrates the relationship of Jesus to the Father as the Son of God and his divine power to give evidence to his divinity to the world.

So the Jewish official or leaders responded to this man carrying his bed, “It is a Sabbath.” They were aware of this man’s illness of thirty-eight years. But they were more concerned with the strict teaching of the Sabbath law. “Thus saith Jehovah, Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 17:21). The Jewish rabbis had developed dozens of items that could not be done on the Sabbath. So it was a rabbinic interpretation that “It is not lawful for you to take (up) the mattress.” Yet there were certain situations that would override the Sabbath law such as a male child being circumcised on the eighth day after birth that fell upon a Sabbath day. Jesus refers

to the event of the oxen falling into a ditch on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5).

The healed man’s response was: “The one making me whole, told me to take up the mattress and walk.” He was not trying to disobey the Sabbath law. He had been healed on the Sabbath day and he obeyed the voice of a higher authority. If one could overrule the powers of nature, certainly he could overrule the spiritual rule of the Sabbath day. Jesus would later prove he had the power or authority by forgiving the man of his sin that cause the illness thirty-eight years before. Jesus had not revealed who he was at that time. He had only demonstrated that he had the power to heal on the Sabbath. The Jews asked him, “Who is the man who said to you to do this”? Who is the man that would violate the Sabbath? They were not interested in knowing about the healing on the Sabbath day. But the healed man could not point out “the man” because Jesus had disappeared into the crowd that was gathering around.

When Jesus healed the ten lepers, he told them to “Go and show yourselves unto the priests” (Luke 17:14). This was a matter of purification in order to return to normal life. So it was with the healed man. He went to the temple in order to offer a sacrifice of purity and joy because he was now whole.

Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple and said: “Behold, you have become whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” Jesus found the man and said, “Listen, you are now whole or healed. Do not go on sinning” (present active imperative). This is a clear indication that the cause of the illness was due to his personal sin. He had suffered for thirty-eight years because of the sin. Jesus also used these words with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:11). But we must remember that all sickness is not due to personal sin (John 9:3). Job argues this with the three friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar who visited him as comforters. Jesus warns that a worse illness would befall him *if* he returned to his old ways (2 Pet. 2:21-23).

The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus. The Jews now want to persecute Jesus. Notice the growing animosity. In John 2:18, at the first cleansing of the temple, the Jews asked Jesus for a sign to show authority to cleanse the temple. And the second time in Judea, the Jews become more suspicious when Jesus began making more disciples than John, the immerser (John 4:1 ff). On several other occasions the question of the Sabbath “works” are recorded (Mark 2:22-24; Luke 6:1-5, etc.). Their hardened hearts now lead them to want to slay him because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. In Numbers 15:31-33, the man who was caught picking up sticks on the Sabbath was stoned.

Jesus said: “My Father works now.” God the Father does his works of goodness regardless of the day. All of his

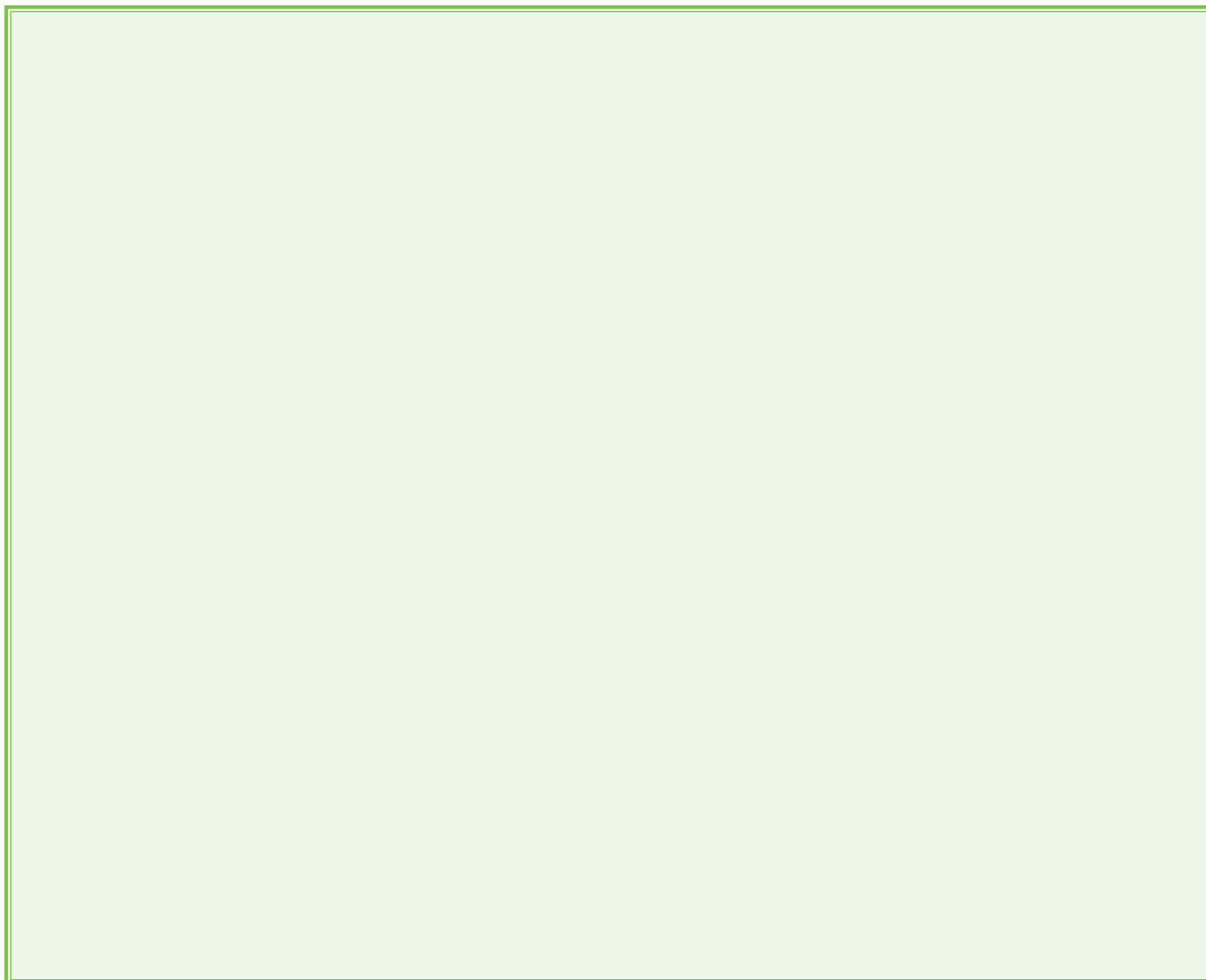
natural laws operate everyday of the week. For this reason, Jesus said: “And I work.” The clear distinction is between the deed and the motivation.

Because of this, the Jews sought the more to kill him. Their anger intensifies, not just because he (1) broke the Sabbath but also because he is (2) making himself equal with God. This is a growing controversy because Jesus claims a relationship equal with God, the Father. Jesus argues his relationship with the Father in a number of recorded events in the Gospel of John (6:32-40; 8:19-54; 10:18-37; 14:7-23; 15:1-24).

The Divinity of Jesus continues to be the main challenge to the world and is the main theme that is argued throughout the Gospel of John (20:30-31). The Divinity of Jesus is the crowning question and the crowning evidence is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (John 2:21-23; 3:13-15;

12:31-35). Thomas said unto them, “Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” A week later, Thomas answered and said unto him, “My Lord and my God.” The Apostle John wrote: “That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us); that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yes, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3). I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Do you?

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“Miracles” continued from front page

be delegated to a human agent. The question is where did Jesus’ power to do the miracle come from. There are two options—either from God or from Satan. Obviously, Jesus’ power came from God. Some suggest that Satan only imitates miracles. I think Satan can perform miracles. He does not have divine power, but he does have supernatural power. So the idea from the word *dunamis* is that there is supernatural power involved.

2. A miracle is an unusual event. Another word, *terasa*, speaks of the effect. *Terasa* speaks of the wonderment of the event—as in signs and wonders. As a matter of fact, *terasa* is always used with *semeion*.

3. A miracle is a significant event. Every miracle is meaningful, that is, full of meaning. The Greek word *semeion* means sign. The event has a special purpose. Matthew, Mark, and Luke make use of the first two words more often. John’s gospel uses the word *semion*, because that writer is focused on the purpose of Jesus in performing the miracles.

Therefore, in our search for a definition, if we combine the ideas of these words used in the New Testament, we might come up with the following definition: A miracle is an unusual and significant event (*terasa*) which requires the working of a supernatural agent (*dunamis*) and is performed for the purpose of authenticating the message or the messenger (*semeion*).

Genuine Miracles vs. False Signs

Distinguishing true miracles from false ones is important in the defense of the Christian religion. Miracles are the unique way that the true God confirms a truth claimed to be from him. However, one must be able to recognize the characteristics of true miracles if he is to distinguish them from the false.

Several obvious distinctions exist between true miracles and false signs. However, before we note these distinctions, let us notice a few of the preconditions of true miracles:

1. A miracle is a special act of God, and there cannot be acts of God unless there is a God who can perform these special acts. Miracles can occur only within the context of a theistic world view. Some people cannot possibly entertain the idea that miracles could ever happen. Since they do not believe in God, any event in the Bible that seems to describe a miracle must necessarily be explained by some alternative natural means. Atheistic or agnostic world views will never admit the possibility of true miracles.

2. A miracle is a divine intervention in the world, and God cannot intervene in the world unless he is in some real sense transcendent over it. The deist, for example,

is skeptical of the notion that God is transcendent over our present realm. He may believe in God, but he refuses to accept the possibility that the God he believes in would ever intervene in the world of men. Therefore, even though he accepts the existence of a divine being, he rejects the God of the Bible. He cannot believe in a God who intervenes in human history.

3. A miracle assumes that God is not only transcendent over his creation, but that he possesses super-natural power. The Bible begins in verse 1 of the first chapter with a description of God’s super-natural power. He is said to have spoken the universe into existence: “And God said, ‘Let there be . . . and there was.’” Scripture does not argue the viability of this point. It is assumed from the very first verse that man is reasonable enough to accept the logic, that if God made the world and everything within it, then he has super-natural power over what he created.

All of these three assumptions are built upon a theistic world view. Once more, let it be stated for the record that, if one entertains either an atheistic or an agnostic world view, he will forever be skeptical of true miracles. All of the evidence that one may marshal to the defense of true miracles in the Bible will have to be understood in terms of some naturalistic explanation. The power and force of the evidence, in the mind of the skeptic, is no more impressive than the occurrence of a natural anomaly (like a solar eclipse) or even a very good magic trick. He may not have a good natural explanation, but there has to be one somewhere, because miracles simply do not happen!

The Five Dimensions of True Miracles

With these things in mind, we now are prepared to see the difference between the true miracle and the false one. According to the Bible, a true miracle has five dimensions which set it apart from the untrue:

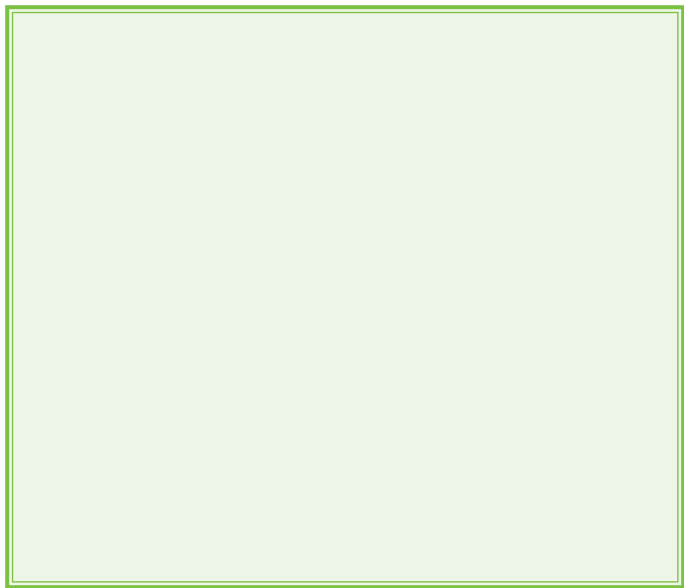
1. A true miracle has an unnatural dimension. It is somehow different from the ordinary, the natural, and thus would never be mistaken from the ordinary. A burning bush that is not consumed by the fire, for example, fits this description (Exod. 3:2). So does a man walking on the surface of a lake (Matt. 14:25-26; Mark 6:48-49; John 6:19).

2. A true miracle has a theological dimension. It presupposes the existence of a divine being who can perform these special acts for some particular reason of his own. Even though such things are unusual in the history of man, they are a regular feature of the divine revelation, for they are an extraordinary means of communication to sentient man. By their miraculous nature they capture the attention of human beings, and assert that the message which attends the event is quite out of the ordinary, and from one who is beyond the realm of the ordinary.

3. A true miracle has a moral dimension. Miracles partake in the nature of the One who manifests them. Every miracle somehow manifests the moral nature of God. There are no evil miracles. This is so because God in his nature is good. A miracle that punishes or judges, of which there are many in the Bible, establishes that God's nature is just. He punishes sin and rewards righteousness.

4. A true miracle has a teleological dimension. "Teleology" refers to a design or plan. Every miracle is purposeful and meaningful. Magic has as its purpose to mystify and entertain. Miracles were never used to entertain (see Luke 23:8). Their overall purpose is to glorify the Creator. Though unnatural by definition, they fit into the creation and befit the nature of the One who is its Creator. The virgin birth, for example, was quite supernatural in its operation (see Matt. 1:18-25), as well as unnatural in its properties, but purposeful in its product. It was absolutely unnatural, and yet not at all anti-natural. Mary's virgin conception resulted in a normal nine-month pregnancy and birth. The child born of this process was in every sense "Immanuel" or "God with us" (cf. Isa. 7:14).

5. A true miracle has a doctrinal dimension. In every case, the miracles of the Bible either directly or indirectly verified important truth claims. In the Old Testament, for example, the miracles of Moses, Elijah, Elisha and others, demonstrated that God was with these men and that he had sent them (cf. Deut. 18:22). In the New Testament the same point is made. "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed" (Mark 16:20). The signs confirmed the word of the apostles and prophets. They always confirm the truth of God through the servant of God (Acts 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). Message and miracles go hand in hand.



What Distinguishes A True Miracle?

True miracles from God are distinct from false signs, magical tricks, sorcery, natural events, and even anomalies of nature (meteors, eclipses, devastating earthquakes, volcanic events, etc.). Each of the following points is applicable to true miracles found in Holy Scripture. None of them applies to these or other occasions of simple human wonderment.

1. A true miracle is an exception to natural law. Natural laws represent generalizations regarding normal, regular, even predictable events. Miracles, on the other hand, represent special, unpredictable, and otherwise inexplicable occurrences. Some have argued persuasively that a fog at Normandy aided the Allied Forces as they invaded Europe, and this led to the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany. Ordinary fog certainly is a "normal, regular, even predictable event" at certain places and times, so it certainly does not qualify as "special, unpredictable, and otherwise inexplicable." The timing of this particular fog may be read by some historians as providential and evidence that God was on the side of the Allies, while still others will read it as merely a stroke of good luck. Under no possible reading of the events can this fog be seen as a miracle in the biblical sense of the word. When Joshua prayed for the sun to stand still in the sky and it lingered there for a whole day in order for his army to defeat the five kings of the Amorites—that was a genuine biblical miracle (see Josh. 10:12-14, "there was no day like that before or a after it").

2. A true miracle produces immediate results. True miracles do not have postponed or delayed effects. The results are instantaneous. "Gradual miracles" do not occur in the Bible. Such terminology is itself a mere linguistic surrender to skepticism and its naturalistic explanations of Bible miracles. In Matthew 8:3 Jesus touched a man and this simple touch immediately cured him of his leprosy. All of the miraculous healings by Jesus and the apostles in the New Testament had such immediacy. No miracle ever took months or even hours. Natural events take time and require process. It takes an entire season of the year to plant, cultivate, grow, harvest, grind, and mix wheat flour for bread. Jesus made it instantly in John chapter 6. It takes eighteen years or more to grow and develop an adult human being, but God created Adam from the dust of the earth immediately (Gen. 1:27; 2:7).

3. A true miracle always brings glory to the only true God. Magic tricks bring fame and fortune to the skilled magician. Occult sorcery may bring awe and wonderment for the purveyor of such witchcraft. Psychosomatic cures may bring attention and monetary reward to the healer. In a superstitious society, even common medicines and herbal remedies and their applications will bring amazement to ignorant villages where medicine men are only students of black magic, spells and enchantments. Bible miracles

brought glory to the God of heaven, and to his Son, Jesus Christ (Matt. 9:8; 15:31; Mark 2:12; Luke 5:26; 7:16; 13:13; 17:15; 23:47; Acts 4:21; 11:18; 21:20).

4. A true miracle always brings good and never evil effects into the natural world. When Jesus or one of the apostles healed a person, the body was restored to its original health as when God first created man (Gen. 1:27-31). When the Lord raised the widow's dead son at Nain (Luke 7:11-16), the awful effects of death were reversed and this distraught mother saw her entire life turned away from weeping to jubilation. In the Savior's own resurrection all of the sons and daughters of Abraham enjoy the potential of a joyful victory over death and the grave (Heb. 2:14, 15). Even the so-called "negative" miracles involving judgments against sin and sinners are good because they demonstrate the justice of God and the defeat of wickedness.

5. True miracles never fail. Miracles are illustrations of God's infinite power. They are the mighty acts of him for whom "all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). When Jesus, for instance, was presented with someone who had an illness, he made no exceptions on account of the particular type of sickness he was faced with: "News about Him spread all over Syria, and people brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, the epileptics and the paralytics, *and He healed them all*" (Matt. 4:24). Furthermore, true biblical miracles have no relapses. If a person was healed in Scripture, that healing was permanent. Pseudo-miracles of our own day, particularly the psychosomatic kind, very often fail. They never work on people who do not believe, and sometimes they do not work on those who do believe. When they do work, often their effect is only partial, and frequently it is only temporary. These cannot be true miracles from God.

False Signs

Satan is a great counterfeiter. He devises false teachers and false prophets (2 Pet. 2:1), false apostles with false gospels (2 Cor. 11:1-15) and even false miracles (2 Thess. 2:9). The seven main verses in the New Testament which deal with use of counterfeit miracles by the Devil and his cohorts are as follows: Matthew 7:21-23; 24:24 and Mark 13:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; Revelation 13:13, 14; 16:14; and 19:20.

In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus spoke of the judgment, providing a dire warning against supposed "signs" accompanying the evils works of those who practice lawlessness: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Matthew 24:24 warned of the arrival of counterfeit messiahs who would use fakery to convince people of their office. This was one of the signs that would portend the fall of the city of Jerusalem, and the destruction of the Temple which was fulfilled in A.D. 70: "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." Mark 13:22 provides a parallel to this text: "False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

Attending Paul's warning about the coming of "the man of sin" is his characterization of that evil figure as a wonder-worker. In 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12, he explains: "And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, *with all power, signs, and lying wonders*, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Three texts found in the book of Revelation describe false signs and fake miracles used by pagan priests and other purveyors of idolatrous worship to deceive the population and convince them that their spurious religion possessed validity. The nature of these "signs" in almost every case is quite impressive, comparable to the Egyptian sorcerers who deceived the Pharaoh and his court with imitations of Moses' miracles (Exod. 7:11-12, 22; 8:7, 18-19). However, at the last it will be remembered that the sorcerers and magicians of Pharaoh could not mimic the plague of lice, nor any of the rest of the Lord's miracles set forth by Moses and Aaron (cf. 8:18-19). In fact, the magicians told Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (8:19).

The author of the Revelation says in 13:11ff:

Then I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed. *It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all; and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth*, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet lived; and it was allowed to give breath to the image. . ."

In speaking of the ultimate punishment of the false prophet who uses false signs to substantiate his claims, the writer says in Revelation 19:20: "And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who *had performed in its*

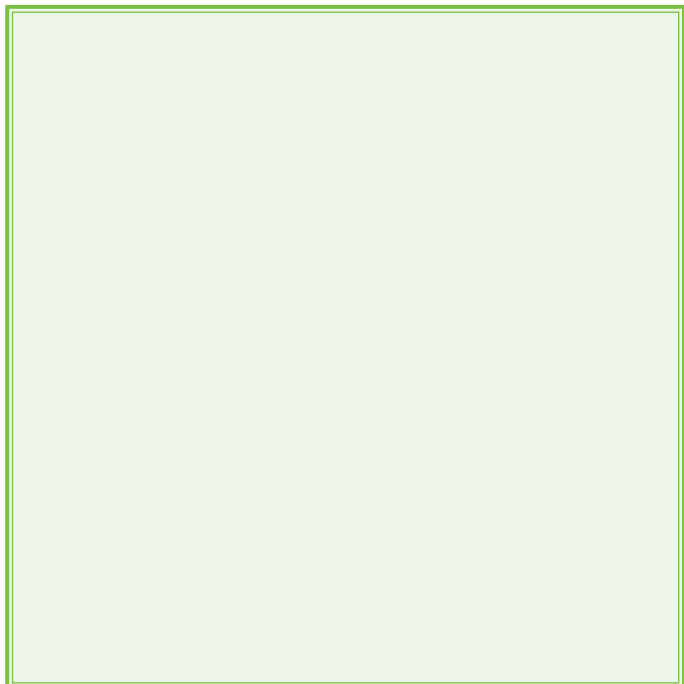
presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.”

In one additional instance in the Revelation, the writer attributes the performance of false signs as a work of demonic spirits in 16:13-14: “And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet. These are *demonic spirits, performing signs*, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.”

Kinds of False Signs

Many unusual events are attributable to God that do not qualify as true miracles. God acts providentially through natural processes. Other unusual events are skillful or cunning acts of human beings, and some appear to have been the work of Satan himself or of his minions the demons. These are not true miracles, however. Satan is a deceiver, but he cannot act transcendently over nature, and certainly never intentionally for God’s glory. Some types of false signs fit under the following headings:

1. Tricks of Magic. A true miracle is distinguishable from magic, but sometimes not easily. Most modern magicians do not even pretend to be miracle workers. They admit that what they do is “sleight of hand” or mere “illusion.” Magic tricks involve innocent deception, but miracles involve no deception. Magic has a purely natural explanation (a false wall that hides a door, a false bottom to a box, a trap-door, hand-cuffs that easily release, etc.).



A miracle is under God’s control, but magic is under the control of a skilful artist.

2. Psychosomatic Cures. The interactions between the mind and the body are well known to both physicians and the public. Many illnesses are not physical at all. They are present in the mind principally, and so, if the patient can be convinced that the disease is cured, then the symptoms will disappear. Medicinal studies must be done carefully in a “double-blind” fashion, one part using the new formulation and the other a placebo, so as to bracket out the possibility that mere suggestion could affect a cure for certain patients. Mind-over-body cures are not miraculous. Rather, they represent one of the aspects of God’s marvelous design of the human body. Faith healers make use of this fact regarding many of the illnesses that plague some people. A certain element of the population will be cured by charismatic faith healers, but no more so than say, bio-feedback mind-training, Scientology, Christian Scientists, or acupuncture.

3. Anomalies of Nature. Many wonderful anomalies occur in nature. Solar and lunar eclipses, falling meteorites, comets, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc. are all naturally occurring phenomena. Such anomalies are quite predictable when carefully and scientifically studied. But anomalies lack the theological, moral, and teleological dimensions that are present in true miracles.

4. Special Providence. Occasionally God uses naturally occurring phenomena to accomplish his purposes. Miracles must not be confused with God’s special providence. These are events which are caused by God indirectly, but not directly. Norman Geisler tells the story of George Muller gathering his little group of hungry English orphans around the dining table to give thanks for food they did not at that moment have to eat. At that time a wagon loaded with bread broke down in front of the orphanage, and all of the bread was given to Muller for his hungry children. That sort of thing represents what may be described as “providence” (God making provision in answer to prayer), but it may not accurately be called a miracle.

5. Counterfeit Satanic Signs. Satan is not capable of genuine miracles. This is true because: (a) He is a created being (Col. 1:15-16). (b) He is not all-powerful (Rev. 20:10). (c) He cannot create life (Gen. 1:21; Deut. 32:39). (d) He cannot raise the dead (Gen. 1:21). (e) He is a master deceiver, but nothing more (John 8:44). Therefore, his miracles are tricks, stunts, and counterfeits (2 Thess. 2:9, “all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders”).

Nineteenth Century Collapse of Belief in Miracles

In his essay, “The Problem Of Miracles: A Historical And Philosophical Perspective,” Dr. William Lane Craig skillfully describes the gradual rejection of miracles as ac-

tual historical occurrences in the modern academic world. This rejection moved from the academic environment (the graduate schools and colleges) into the churches and onto the street. He says that there are two steps to follow in establishing that a miracle has occurred, according to the Göttingen professor of theology Gottfried Less in his *The Truth of the Christian Religion* (1758): first, one must determine the historicity of the event itself and, second, one must determine the miraculous character of that event (260-262). During the ensuing century, the viability of both of these steps came to be regarded with great skepticism, resulting in the general collapse within German theology of the credibility of the gospel miracle stories. Such skepticism moved gradually across the Continent to the other European nations, and finally to the Americas.

First to disintegrate was the second step identified by professor Less. German Rationalists of the late seventeenth/early eighteenth centuries were willing, indeed, sometimes eager, to grant the historicity of the event itself, as called for in step one. But they were at pains to provide a purely natural explanation for the event, thus undercutting step two. Given that events with supernatural causes do not occur, there simply had to be some account available in terms of merely natural causes. Thus Karl Bahrdt, in his *Fulfillment of the Plans and Purposes of Jesus* (1784-92) explains the feeding of the 5000 by postulating a secret store of bread which Jesus and his disciples distributed to the multitude; Jesus' walking on the water was effected by a platform floating just beneath the surface; his raising the dead was actually reanimation from a coma, thus preventing premature burial. This last explanation provided the key to explaining Jesus' own resurrection. By the end of the eighteenth century, the theft hypothesis, so dear to Deism, had apparently pretty much lost conviction, and a new explanation was needed. This German Rationalism found in the "apparent death theory." According to Bahrdt, Jesus' death and resurrection were a hoax engineered by Jesus himself to convince people that he was the Messiah.

But the dean of the natural explanation school was certainly Heinrich E.G. Paulus (1761-1851), professor of theology at Heidelberg. In his German works *Philological-Critical and Historical Commentary on the New Testament* (1800-02), *The Life of Jesus, As Basic Foundation for the History of Early Christianity* (1828), and *Exegetical Handbook Concerning the First Three Gospels* (1830), he perfected the art of explaining naturalistically the miraculous elements in the gospels while retaining a close adherence to the letter of the text. A pantheist who accepted Spinoza's dictum, '*Deus sive Natura*,' (God is not distinguishable from Nature) Paulus rejected all miracles *a priori*. Although he staunchly insisted that the main point of his *Life of Jesus* was not to explain away miracles, it is nevertheless true that he expended a great deal of effort

doing precisely this, and it is chiefly for this effort that he is remembered.

According to Paulus, miracles are not the important thing, but rather "the spirit of Jesus as seen in his thought and actions." It is the person of Jesus in his moral character and courage that is truly miraculous. The true meaning of Christianity is to be found in the teachings of Jesus, which, Paulus said, are self-evidently true, as demonstrated by their inner spirituality. In any case, literal miracles, even if they had occurred, would contribute nothing toward grounding the Christian truth. "The main point is already certain in advance, that the most inexplicable changes in the course of Nature can neither overturn nor prove any spiritual truth, since it cannot be seen from any event of Nature for what spiritual purpose it should so happen and not otherwise" (Vol. 2, 2, xi).

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), the father of modern theology, followed Paulus' lead in these regards. Schleiermacher remained rationalistic with respect to the denial of miracles, and he attached no religious importance to the resurrection of Jesus. In his lectures of 1832, *The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History*, he passively accepted Paulus' theory of Jesus' merely apparent death, stating that it is unimportant whether the death and resurrection of Christ were real or apparent. Schleiermacher himself believed that Jesus' resurrection was only a resuscitation and that he continued to live physically with the disciples for a time after this event.

Three years after Schleiermacher's lectures a work appeared which sounded the death knell for the natural explanation school and also served to undercut the first step of Less's procedure: David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* ("*The Life of Jesus*"). Strauss did not believe the miracles of the Bible actually happened as described, but he rejected the harsh rationalism of the past. He opted instead for a mythological interpretation of the miracles. Strauss was the first to compose a wholesale account of the life of Jesus utilizing mythological explanation as the key hermeneutical method. In his *Leben Jesu*, Strauss sought to show in detail how all supernatural events in the gospels can be explained as myths, legends, or editorial and redactional additions. Until Strauss it had been pretty generally agreed that the events in question had actually occurred—it was just a matter of explaining how they took place. But with Strauss, the miraculous events recorded in the gospels never in fact happened: the narratives are unhistorical tales shaped by myth and legend. Strauss's work completely altered the whole tone and course of German theology, and with it theology in general. Although much discussion has occurred since the time of Strauss, his method is generally assumed to be the correct one in the modern academic approach to the miraculous aspects of the Bible. Most academics do not think the miracles really happened. They only happened in

the fertile minds of later writers who, with each succeeding generation expanded the stories, until they reached their present state in the literature.

Papyrus Manuscripts Restore Confidence in Miracles For Many

The major problem with this approach is a patently obvious one: scholars cannot prove that the gospel accounts were not written by eyewitnesses, or that they went through a series of literary revisions over several generations. All of the recent evidence lends credence to the notion that the gospels were in fact written not long after the events in question. Traditional information has always been unanimous on the matter: all of the gospels except Luke was penned by an eyewitness, and Luke reported the information he gleaned directly from eyewitness interviews. John seemed to represent the final written gospel. An important papyrus discovery in 1920 (P⁵²) dated from about A.D. 125 (provenance is Fayyum or Oxyrinchus, Egypt), now residing in the John Rylands library (fragment 457), has four verses from John 18. So, scholars are now in possession of a copy of part of the final written gospel which had already circulated in Egypt from not long after the end of the first century. The last written gospel was penned, therefore, before the end of the first century.

Similarly, three small papyrus fragments from the Gospel of Matthew were found at Luxor, Egypt, generally dated to the period ca. A.D. 200. These are designated Papyrus 64 (P⁶⁴), or the Magdalen Papyrus, because they are housed at the Magdalen College Library in Oxford, England. Carsten Peter Thiede in 1995 questioned this late date, concluding that these materials ought to be dated between A.D. 70-100. Thiede has been broadly criticized by liberal writers, but his date may well be correct. If it is, then Matthew was already circulating in Egypt in the last quarter of the first century A.D., and we possess a copy that proves it was written well before the end of the first century.

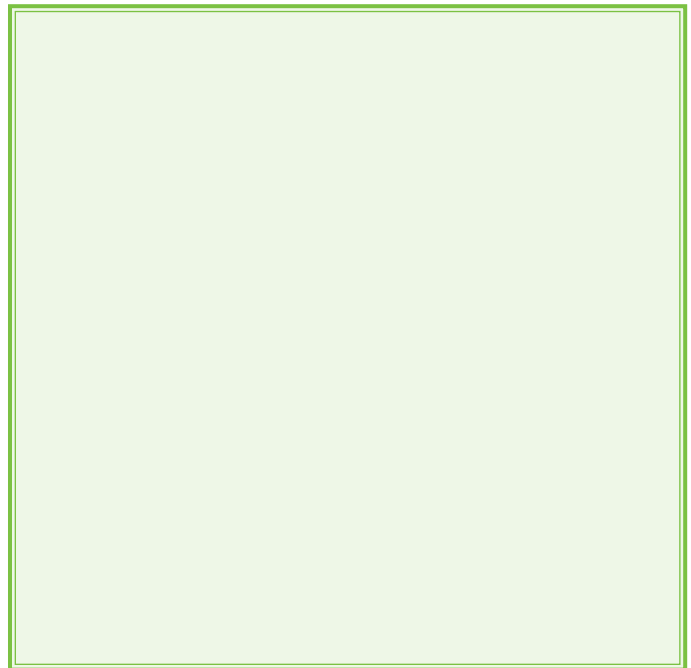
Chester Beatty Papyrus 46, discovered around 1930, near Fayum, Egypt together with two (possibly) younger manuscripts of the Gospels, Acts and Revelation is housed partially in Dublin, Ireland in the Chester Beatty Collection and partially in the University of Michigan, Special Collections Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan. This manuscript was published only a few years after its discovery in 1936, by Fredrick Kenyon, who dated it to the early third century. Papyrologist Ulrich Wilcken, around the same time dated it to A.D. 200. Wilcken's view became the dominant assessment among scholars. Over fifty years later new discoveries and reevaluation of evidence was applied to Papyrus 46. Young Kyu Kim in a thorough and highly technical paper concluded that Papyrus 46 should be dated to the later first century before the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96). Kim compared handwriting styles and linguistic changes from papyri of various known dates and found that Papyrus 46

matched much more closely those found in late first century documents than those of the second century. Kim's view has proven very difficult to reject, even by some who are skeptical of it. If Kim's dating is correct it would mean that we have in this case a near complete copy of Paul's epistles which was penned before the end of the first century! The apostle Paul assumes all throughout his writings that the Jesus of his preaching is the Son of God and a risen savior. For Paul, Jesus is not just a Jewish Rabbi who has captured his imagination with his superlative teaching, he is the All-powerful Son of the Most High. In other words, he postulates a miracle-working Jesus at every turn in his letters. It is the basis of his faith and the reason for his dedication to Christ.

These early papyrus manuscripts militate against any theory that depends upon long periods of time for myths or legends to develop, or even extended periods of editorial changes of original documents to explain the appearance of miracles in the biblical accounts of the life of Christ. The miracles of Jesus cannot be accounted for nearly as easily as had been surmised. Nor could they be disposed of on the basis of these simplistic and speculative reconstructions of events. The evidence is solidly against them and on the side of the historical veracity of the story of Jesus as recounted by all four of the writers of the canonical Gospels. Attempts to separate these authors, even one generation, from the events they narrate have collapsed under the weight of the increasing evidence.



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“Water to Wine” continued from p. 2
task, Mary had neither part nor lot in the matter. Thus, Jesus tells his mother, “mine hour is not yet come.” In the book of John, the *hour* of our Lord repeatedly refers to his ultimate glorification which would take place in his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of his Father (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1). It was not time for the glory of Jesus to be fully manifested.

Nevertheless, while the hour had not yet come for Jesus to manifest his glory fully, Jesus would give secondary manifestations of his glory throughout his personal ministry (*all of his miracles fall into this category*). It seems clear that we do not have the full conversation between Jesus and Mary recorded for us, but Jesus said something to Mary to indicate that he would help with the present problem. So Mary tells the servants, “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (v. 5). Jesus then proceeded to perform his first public miracle by turning water into wine and saving the day for the bridegroom and his family (John 2:6-10).

Now, before we look at what we can learn about Jesus from this marvelous miracle, let’s quickly dismiss any notion that Jesus encouraged social drinking here. Some claim that Jesus put his stamp of approval on social drinking by turning water into wine. The question is, “Into what kind of wine did Jesus turn the water?” Was it fermented or unfermented? The word “wine” in John 2 is from the Greek word *oinos*. Vine says that it is the general word for wine. It can be used to denote fermented juice of the grape (Acts 2:13), freshly pressed juice from the grape (Matt. 9:17), or even to juice while still inside the grape (Rev. 19:15). One cannot simply assume by the word “wine” that fermented juice is under consideration. Where is the evidence in the text that shows that Jesus turned water into fermented drink that could get people drunk? If anything the text reveals that the wine was unfermented by the word *good* found in ver. 10. In the days of Jesus good wine was wine that was destitute of spirit. Listen to Barnes on this point:

[The good wine] This shows that this had all the qualities of real wine. We should not be deceived by the phrase *good* wine. We often use the phrase to denote that it is good in proportion to its strength and its power to intoxicate; but no such sense is to be attached to the word here. Pliny, Plutarch, and Horace describe wine as good, or mention that as the *best* wine, which was harmless or innocent. The most useful wine was that which had little strength; and the most wholesome wine was that which had not been adulterated by the addition of anything to the juice. Pliny expressly says that a good wine was one that was destitute of spirit (lib. Iv. C. 13). It should not be assumed, therefore, that the good wine was stronger than the other: it is rather to be presumed that it was milder (*Barnes’ Notes*, Electronic Database).

In light of what the Bible says about intoxicating drink (Prov. 23:31-33), it is hard for me to believe that Jesus

produced wine of such a nature. In fact, one might argue, according to Habakkuk 2:15 that, if Jesus produced such a large amount of intoxicating drink, he violated the law and therefore sinned. But we are not in any way forced into such a conclusion for there is no evidence from the text that Jesus did any such thing. It should also be noted that even if Jesus turned the water into the kind of fermented wine that was common in Palestine in that day, that wine would be something completely different from anything one could buy today. J.W. Shepherd notes:

Jesus made real wine out of water. But there was a great difference between the Palestinian wine of that time and the alcoholic mixtures which today go under the name of wine. Their simple vintage was taken with three parts of water and would correspond more or less to our grape juice. It would be worse than blasphemy to suppose, because Jesus made wine, that he justifies the drinking usages of modern society with its bars, strong drinks, and resulting evils (J.W. Shepherd, *The Christ* 90).

What Does This Miracle Teach Us About Who Jesus Is?

Jesus of Nazareth is no ordinary man. Ordinary men do not have power over material substance. Only divine Beings have such power and Jesus is divine. Jesus is deity and this miracle proves it. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and master of Israel, came to Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” Nicodemus was right. Jesus indeed came from God and God was with him (John 1:1-2). Evidence of this truth is found, not just in the incomparable teachings of Christ, but in the works he performed. Jesus reminded the Jews of this when he said to them, “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:37-38). These works that Jesus refers to have reference to the miracles he performed. The miracles performed by Christ will always be a testimony of his true identity as the Son of God. This beginning of miracles is no exception. It instilled faith in the hearts of his disciples (v. 11), and it, along with all the recorded miracles of Christ, should fully convince us that Jesus is indeed the Son of God (John 20:30-31). And if Jesus is the Son of God, he is deity for the Son must of necessity be of the same nature as the Father. Whenever Jesus claimed God as his Father, he was affirming his deity and equality with the Father, not in authority, but in nature. This is why the Jews sought to kill him whenever he made such a claim (John 5:17-18; 10:30-33). Notwithstanding the objections of the Jews in the first century, nor the objections of some in the religious world today, Jesus is God. How can we be so sure? We can be sure because only God can turn water into wine.

The Ability of Jesus to Meet Our Spiritual Needs

Jesus is no longer turning water into wine but the ability

of Christ to come to our rescue and help us in times of need remains. This is most importantly true when it comes to our spiritual needs. Just like Jesus transformed the water into wine in John 2, he has the ability to transform us into the kind of disciples with whom God wants to spend an eternity. Jesus can change wishy-washy disciples into steadfast and reliable disciples. Jesus can change bad husbands into great husbands. Jesus can change worldly-minded sinners into God-fearing Christians. How does he do it? He does it through the power of his word. Jesus has given us his word and that word has the ability to reshape and reform the greatest sinners. The Christians at Corinth were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, drunkards, homosexuals and more, but Jesus changed them by the power of the gospel (1 Cor. 6:10-11). The Christians at Thessalonica were idolaters, but, by his indestructible and incorruptible truth (1 Pet. 1:22-25), Jesus changed them into servants of the living God (1 Thess. 1:9). Paul was a blasphemer, and a persecutor and injurious (1 Tim. 2:13), but Jesus, again by the power of his word, changed him into one of the greatest Christians of all time. Jesus may never change water into wine again, but he is still in the changing business. He is in the business of changing lives.

When Jesus makes a change, it is always for the better. The wine that Jesus produced was better than the water that was poured into pots. Will you let Jesus, through the power of the gospel, change your life for the better? If you are not a Christian, will you let Jesus change you into a child of God? If you are a child of God who is uncommitted and apathetic, will you let Jesus transform you into someone who seeks first the kingdom of God? If you are a strong Christian, will you let Jesus continue to change you into an even stronger Christian by the power of that same word? Jesus wants to help all of us, but we have to do something. Just like the servants at the wedding had to fill the pots with water, Jesus demands that we fill our hearts with his word and live by it. If we are willing to do that, he will transform our ordinary lives into extraordinary lives and give us the abundant life he promises his true disciples (John 10:10).

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(This series will continued in the next issue of *Truth Magazine*.)

PREACHER NEEDED

Rosenberg, Texas: The Rosenberg church of Christ, meeting at 908 Frost St., is in need of a full-time preacher who is interested in doing personal work. They are a small congregation of 18 members who are standing with our Lord in all aspects of his word. They can support at this time \$1500 per month. If interested, please contact Kenneth Martin, 3620 Ave. R, Rosenberg, Texas 77471 or call 281-232-2974, e-mail: kmartin1020@houston.rr.com

Field Report

India Report — 2005

On October 10, 2005 I left home for my fifteenth and best gospel preaching/teaching trip to India. By God's grace, I was safely reunited with my wife late on November 16th. During the time in India I taught three Preacher Training Classes, each one lasting from Monday through Friday; normally we had classes from 9:00 a.m. to noon and from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. I also preached a scant twenty (20) times. Normally, this would not have been the rainy season in India, but the heaviest rains in some thirty years cut the number of preaching appointments nearly in half. This may have been fortuitous; by the end of the third Preachers Training (i.e., Conversion) Class (composed primarily of

denominational preachers) my voice was about gone, and the next week (in which most of the preaching was done), I was in doubt, at times, if I could continue. There were fifty-seven conversions, one of whom (Sk. Asli) had been a Muslim. The ages of those who were baptized ranged from seventeen (B. Gopal, Hindu) to seventy (N. Saraswathi, also a Hindu). The fifty-seven (57) conversions were thirty-two (32) less than my last similar effort in 2003. In spite of the raw statistics just given this was, I firmly believe this was my finest effort in the Lord's work in India.

On this trip a good deal of time was spent teaching denominational preachers and preaching in denominational congregations. The one statistic that makes this trip unique(to me) is the fact that one-third (19) of the fifty-seven individuals baptized were denominational preachers. Most of the denominational preachers were Individual Workers (i.e., Independent Churches), with a few associated with various Pentecostal groups, one was from GFA (Gospel For Asia), another had emotional ties with CSI (his grandfather was a Pastor in the Church of South India), and one was from the Lutheran Church. The soul of a (former) denominational preacher is of no more spiritual value than the soul of a field worker, but the (former) denominational preacher has a far more likely prospect of being able to lead others to the truth. In fact, this has already begun. Three of the (former) denominational preachers have already been joined by his wife; one father has taken a stand with his son, and a son joined his father in Christ.

To cap it off, I have received two invitations to come to two new (to me) areas to hold additional Preacher Training (i.e.,

Conversion) Classes with denominational preachers. I do not expect to accept these invitations in the near future, but such is a possibility in a year or two.

Before going to India we had 40,000 tracts and 5000 song books printed, and left the money to print an additional 120,000 tracts. That is a total of 10,000 copies each of sixteen different tracts. Lord willing, another tract, yet to be written, will be translated and printed within a few months. Following one of the classes, one of my translators requested that the material be put into tract form. This we intend to do, and will have it printed as soon as practical.

Each preacher who attended one of the three Preachers Training Classes received, on the last day of classes, a package with five of the song books and five copies each of the four tracts already printed. In addition, the men who attended the third, i.e., denominational class, received a copy of L.A. Molt's tract *What Is The Church of Christ?* on the first day of classes. There were approximately thirty-five denominational preachers in the third week of classes. Before leaving India we saw seventeen (17) of these men put on their Lord in baptism. The other two denominational preachers who were baptized were not in the Preachers Training (Conversion) Classes, but were present when we had a preaching service at the denominational congregation.

Thanks to the generosity of some individual saints, I was also able to leave benevolence and support for three preachers. It is always an encouragement to me to know that many of the saints in America are truly (financially) interested in the gospel being preached in other places. For our brethren in India, I say, "Thank-you"!

Rejoice with me! Pray for our new brothers and sisters-in-Christ! To God be all the glory!

Walk with God. **William V. Beasley**

Obituary

Passing of Brother Dale Walden

Shortly after midnight this morning (12-22-05) Illinois time, brother Dale Walden of Hidalgo, Illinois departed this life. For more than a year, he had been a resident of Lake Lord Rehab and Care Center in Effingham, Illinois due his suffering the dread illness of Alzheimer's. His loving wife, Lucille, departed this life last spring. Dale's mental abilities never permitted his knowledge of her passing. Dale had grown progressively worse in recent weeks and his death is indeed a blessing regarding his condition.

Dale had served as an elder in the Lord's church for many years. Hidalgo, Walnut Chapel and Casey (Eastside) each

were guided by his diligent stand for the truth. His death seemingly brings to close an "era" of men with his caliber. He would be numbered in the generation of strong Christians who preached and taught in east-central Illinois: men such as J.C. Roady, J.W. Gallagher, Everett Stivers, Bill Read, Lyle Berry, Loyal Hall, Dan and Willie Mathis, Galen Wells, etc. Many of us "grew up" under the tutelage of these soldiers of the cross. They being dead yet speak (Heb. 11:4) and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

The funeral was at Barley's of Greenup, Illinois on Saturday, December 24, 2005. Our sympathy is extended to Dale's only daughter, Velina Dooley and her family of Hidalgo, Illinois. **Michael Davis, 825 W. Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403.**

Quips & Quotes

Catholics in Poll Say It's OK to Miss Mass

"Washington — Three-quarters of American Roman Catholics consider themselves in good standing with their church even if they don't attend Mass weekly or obey the church ban on artificial contraception, according to a new survey.

"The wide-ranging poll also asked Catholics their political affiliation, with 37 percent saying they're Republican, 41 percent Democrat and 22 percent independent.

"Asked about possible responses to their priest shortage, three-quarters said the church should ordain married men, while 61 percent supported ordaining celibate women. Eighty-one percent said clergy who left the priesthood to marry should be allowed to return.

"The survey was partly funded by the National Catholic Reporter, an independent newsweekly. The poll of 875 people had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points" (*The Indianapolis Star* [November 19, 2005], B3).

South African High Court Allows Same-Sex Marriage

"Johannesburg — South Africa's highest court ruled Thursday that gays and lesbians have a right to marry, and it gave the national parliament one year to change the words 'husband' and 'wife' to 'spouse' in its marital laws.

Under the ruling, which was greeted with jubilation by gays and lesbians and frustration by some church leaders, South Africa will become the first African nation and the fifth in the world to extend full marital rights to same-sex couples" (*The Indianapolis Star* [December 2, 2005], A8).





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