

# **Characteristics of New Testament Miracles**

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**10/27/2013**

## **Introduction**

In this lesson, let us consider the characteristics of New Testament miracles. Our study will show that the miracles of the Bible were undeniable, instantaneous, complete, diverse, unstaged, and open to investigation. They supported truth, and not error. Furthermore, the victims were not blamed in the case of failure. The miracles of Jesus are genuine, assuring us that He is the Son of God. The miracles of the apostles and prophets are authentic, confirming their message and ministry.

All this stands in stark contrast with the so-called miracles of modern-day faith healers. The miracles of contemporary “slap-em in the head, slay the Spirit, cure Aunt Sally of consumption” Charismatics are bogus. An examination of the evidence reveals that the Leroy Jenkins, Peter Popoffs, Ernest Angleys, and Oral Roberts of this world are impious frauds. Their ministries cannot withstand open scrutiny. Their alleged miracles are but a pale imitation, a fraudulent replica, and a counterfeit reproduction of what we read of in the Bible.

## **They Were Undeniable**

New Testament miracles were undeniable. Open minded individuals could clearly see the hand of God at work (John 3:1-2). Even the enemies of truth were forced to acknowledge the reality of these signs. This was evident when Jesus healed the blind man (John 9:16), when he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:46-47), and also when Peter and John healed the lame man (Acts 4:14-16). In contrast, contemporary miracles are often questionable, doubtful, and dubious. Independent examination frequently exposes the fraudulent claims of faith healers.

## **They Were Instantaneous**

New Testament miracles of healing were instantaneous. Included were the miraculous healing of blindness (Matt. 20:30-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43), deformity (Luke 13:11-13), leprosy (Matt. 8:1-3; Mark 1:40-42; Luke 5:12-13), hemorrhaging (Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-29; Luke 8:40-47), lameness/ paralysis (Luke 5:17-25; John 5:1-9), sickness (Luke 4:38-39), and even death (Mark 5:35-42; Luke 8:49-55). The only possible exception to this pattern was the blind man at Bethsaida, but even here, complete healing was accomplished in a matter of minutes (Mark 8:22-25). New Testament miracles did not require time for nature to take its course; rather, the effects were immediate. In contrast, modern-day faith healers often say, “You should expect gradual recovery.”

## **They Were Complete**

New Testament miracles of healing were complete. Whatever the malady, no matter how serious the illness or infirmity, the person that was healed was made whole (Matt. 12:9-13; Acts 3:6-10, 16). Yet, today those who are “healed” often manifest only a slight momentary improvement, and frequently experience serious relapses. Consider the case of Ernest Angley, a faith healer from Akron, Ohio. Angley, a flamboyant actor with a flair for the dramatic, normally puts on a good show, but even the best performers have off nights. On one occasion, Angley was trying to heal a man who was hard of hearing. He stuck his fingers in the man’s ears, twisted them around a few times, and then prayed that the man’s hearing might be restored. When Ernest was finished, the man’s wife whispered, “*Honey?*” into one of his ears. The man said, “*Yes.*” Then she whispered in his other ear, “*Baby?*” Once again, the man replied, “*Yes.*” Filled with amazement and bliss, Ernest Angley lifted his eyes toward heaven, and cried with a loud voice, “*Hallelujah!*” The man then looked at Ernest with a quizzical expression and replied, “*Not bad, How are you?*”

## **They Were Diverse**

In the New Testament, all kinds of miracles were performed (Matt. 4:24; 8:16; 9:35; 15:30). Jesus and the apostles healed those who were blind, deaf, and mute. They cured deformity, paralysis, lameness, leprosy, all manner of sickness, disease and even death. Jesus demonstrated His power over every sphere of nature. Compare His accomplishments to those of modern-day miracle workers. Can they calm the winds or walk on water? Can they feed 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fishes? Can they heal all manner of sickness? Can they raise the dead? Of course not!

The current crop of faith healers limit their practice to internal maladies, headaches, sinus trouble, and psychosomatic illnesses that respond to suggestion, etc. Several years ago, Lewis Grizzard, the well-known syndicated newspaper columnist, wrote an article entitled “*Miracles Are Few, But Laughs Are Many*” in which he poked fun at today’s faith healers.<sup>1</sup> Grizzard said, “The first time I became suspicious of faith healers was when Brother Roy Dodd Hembree came to my hometown with his faith healing tent ministry. One year, Miss Inez Pickett, an old maid school-teacher who had been plagued with kidney problems her entire life, decided to see if Brother Roy Dodd could help her.” “Brother Roy Dodd grabbed Miss Inez, proceeded to beseech the Almighty to try and remove her malady. With a great, joyous cry he proclaimed Miss Inez healed, and she commenced to jump around on the platform in her newly found healthy state. She became so excited, however, that she fell off the platform and broke her leg.” “*Somebody call an ambulance,*” said the first one to reach her. “*No need for that,*” someone cried, “*just get Brother Roy Dodd to heal her.*” However, Brother Roy Dodd declined. “*I don’t do broken bones,*” he said, “*Just vital organs.*”

## **They Were Unstaged**

New Testament miracles were unstaged. Those healed were well known to the audience (Acts 3:1-10). Their illness was a matter of public record (Mark 5:25-29). Today it is not the same. Sometimes the sick show up in town about the same times as the healers. If you pay close attention to some groups, you will find that some of those healed ride the bus out of town with

the healing evangelist. They travel with him to the next town, where the so-called “miracle” is repeated.

O.J. Willis of Groveton, Texas told the story of an old-time faith-healer who came to town, promising to raise the dead. At the front of the big tent, the “deceased” was stretched-out in a coffin, pale and gray, looking bereft of life, and asleep in Jesus. Before the services, crowds passed by the coffin, quietly viewing the body, until the unexpected happened. It seems some of the local boys were determined to follow 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:1, which says, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” As one of these young whippersnappers passed by the casket, he produced a long straight-pin, which he proceeded to poke in the side of the prostrate body. Commotion and bedlam ensued, as the lifeless man was prematurely, unexpectedly, and violently raised from the dead! (Another variation of this story says that the man who welded the pin was one John O’Doud, a gospel preacher of yesteryear.)

Peter Popoff, a squeaky-voiced TV faith healer from Upland, California, was able to fool millions, until foiled by debunker James Randi. This particular charlatan was noted for “calling out” members of the audience and then healing them. While on stage, Popoff would call out the names and addresses of individuals to whom he had not spoken, identify their specific ailments, and then allegedly heal them. How was he able to know such details? Was this the voice of God? Not hardly. Investigators discovered that prior to the show, Popoff’s staff subtly and shrewdly would gather information (names, address, ailments) on individuals in the audience. Popoff wore a tiny hearing aid in his left ear, connected to a high-frequency receiver tuned to 39.17 megahertz, a short-wave band. His wife, Elizabeth, broadcasting to Peter from backstage, transmitted the needed information to Popoff, and directed him to the right people. Thus he was able to exercise the “gift of knowledge,” identifying them by name and affliction.<sup>ii</sup>

## **They Were Open To Investigation**

New Testament miracles were verifiable. Their legitimacy was confirmed and substantiated by the evidence. Jesus made the dumb to speak, the blind to see, and the lame to walk. The effects were manifest to all. In contrast with the New Testament example, today faith healers will not submit to verification, certification, or testing. They refuse to submit their ministries to public scrutiny, and become indignant when questioned, examined or interrogated. In contrast with such stonewalling techniques, the Bible affirms the value of open investigation (Acts 17:11; Rom. 16:17-19; 1 Thess. 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:1-3).

Furthermore, neither Jesus nor his apostles ever said it was impossible to perform a miracle because unbelievers were present. However, this dodge is often used by modern-day faith healers who know that critics are in the audience. Jesus was not swayed just because his opponents were watching. In fact, he relished the opportunity to prove his message (Mark 3:1-5).

## **They Supported Truth, Not Error**

New Testament miracles supported truth, not error (Mark 16:17-20; Heb. 2:1-4). Even the inspired message of the apostle Paul was compared to previously revealed truth (Acts 17:11). We

must study to present ourselves approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15), examining everything carefully, and holding fast to that which is good (1 Thess. 5:21).

In the Old Testament, the apparent miracles and message of prophets were to be tested. If their message was false, they were to be rejected, despite their apparent miraculous power (Deut. 13:1-5). In like manner, saints of the New Testament era are warned against the lying wonders of lawless men (2 Thess. 2:7-12). We must test the spirits because many false prophets have gone forth into the world (1 John 4:1). God would never empower false teachers who teach destructive heresies (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

## **They Didn't Blame The Victim For Failure**

When modern-day faith healers are unsuccessful, they typically blame the sick person for not having enough faith. However, in the New Testament, the ability to perform miracles was dependent upon the faith of those who possessed the gifts of the Spirit. In the New Testament, failure to perform a miracle demonstrated a lack of faith on the part of the healer (Matt. 17:14-21).

Faith was often manifested by those who sought healing. In a few cases, it is specifically mentioned as playing a significant role (Matt. 9:20-22; Mark 10:51-52). Sometimes a lack of faith caused Jesus to limit His ministry in certain areas (Matt. 13:58; Mark 6:5). However, in other cases the person healed demonstrated no faith at all. This is certainly true of the lame man whom Peter and John healed in the Temple. Notice, that it was the faith of Peter and John, not the lame man, that brought about the miracle. The lame man was simply asking for money from the apostles, not realizing who they were (Acts 3:1-6). As J. W. McGarvey says, "He showed no faith either in Jesus, or in the healing power of the apostles, until he found himself able to stand and walk. The faith, then, was that of Peter; and this accords with what we learn in the Gospels, that the working of a miracle by those possessed of spiritual gifts was always dependent on their faith."<sup>iii</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen, the miracles of the Bible were undeniable, instantaneous, complete, diverse, unstaged, and open to investigation. They supported truth, and not error. Finally, the victims were not blamed in the case of failure.

All of this stands in stark contrast with the work of modern-day faith healers. Their miracles are dubious and doubtful. Long periods of time are often necessary to affect a complete recovery. Modern-day miracle workers perform only a select few types of miracles, and the vast majority of their healings cannot be perceived by the senses. Preliminary inquiries are often used to weed out the hard cases. Most healings are psychosomatic in nature. Success requires a highly-emotional, almost hysterical atmosphere, that exerts a powerful psychological effect upon those seeking a miracle. Services are often staged. Charismatic leaders avoid the light of open, unbiased investigation. False doctrines are commonly taught. Failure is common. Tragically, if the faith healer is unsuccessful, he often blames the sick person for not having enough faith. What an unmitigated travesty!

In January of 1978, Ernest Angley was holding a “miracle and healing rally” in North Carolina. He announced that he would pray for everyone with heart problems. One woman with chronic heart trouble had come to seek Angley’s blessing. During the services, she slumped to the floor. The ushers, who believed the woman was simply overcome with spiritual ecstasy, turned away offers of help for about 20 minutes. Afterwards, the victim was taken to the hospital and pronounced dead. How did the great faith healer respond to this tragic news? Said Mr. Angley: “Church is a wonderful place to go to heaven from.”

Compare this cop-out to the example of Paul at Troas. On the first day of the week, the saints assembled in an upper room, where the apostle preached until midnight. A young man named Eutychus, sitting on the windowsill, fell asleep as Paul spoke, and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead. Did the apostle Paul say, “Church is a wonderful place to go to heaven from.” No. The text says, Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, “Do not be troubled, for his life is in him.” Afterwards they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted (Acts 20:7-12).

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<sup>i</sup> Lewis Gizzard, *The Register and Tribune Syndicate, Inc.*, Denver, CO., Date Unknown.

<sup>ii</sup> James Randi, *The Faith Healers*, (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1987), p. 139-181.

<sup>iii</sup> J. W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on Acts*, (1892; Reprint ed., Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Foundation, n.d.), p. 56.