

## The Failure Of Miracles To Produce Righteousness

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How often do miracles occur in the life of a Christian or in the life of anyone for that matter? When they do, how do they affect the average person? Is there immediate conversion? Is he immediately convinced to rid his life of sin?

In the gospel the story of the healing of the paralytic was impressive and exciting to everyone present. Energetic crowds of interested people pressed in at the door to hear Jesus Christ proclaim the truths that sounded so new to everyone. The Pharisees, the scribes, and the common people there were unaware that they were about to witness strong proof of Christ's deity and the power of God. The issue of Christ as the Son of God is the focus of the miracle of the healing of the paralytic. There are three places in the gospels that it is found.

These are parallel scriptures each emphasizing slightly different aspects of the miracle. Listen to the last verse of each of these accounts; you do not have to turn there:

**Matthew 9:8** Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

**Mark 2:12** Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

**Luke 5:26** And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today!"

The people were stunned; moved to glorify God; filled with fear; and absolutely confounded at what they were seeing. It is no surprise that the witnesses to the miracle were amazed and astounded at this healing. Each of

the three gospel writers uses a different Greek word to express a variation of the state of awe in which these people were at that time.

Now nevertheless and considering the great initial impact this miracle had on their observers, most of them were not moved to have faith in God. Though filled with awe at God's mighty works they were not convinced or converted. In II Corinthians 5:7, the apostle Paul reminds us that faith is not produced through sight, and even though they saw such a wonderful and great thing, it did not have the effect that it would for a converted person.

Miracles and physical proof do not instill faith. God must call a person, opening his mind to His truth before a miracle really has a spiritual effect on them. Today, people tend to think that sensationalism will convert sinners, designing the religious presentation to impress people and increase followers by physical rather than spiritual quality. In addition, the people who witnessed the healing of the paralytic were moved to glorify God in their limited way, yet the reaction to the healing did not cause a change of heart in them.

Luke writes that they were all filled with fear, and it can be terrifying to be near the power of the Almighty God, most certainly. In Hebrews 10:31, Paul states (assuming Paul is the author):

**Hebrews 10:31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Peter knelt in fear at Jesus's knees when he realized his own sinfulness in the presence of the perfection and might of God, and he fearfully pleaded, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man o Lord." (Luke 5:8) So there is no doubt that the presence of God and the presence of God's tremendous outstanding miracles is a fearful thing.

Despite this however, most of the witnesses to the paralytic's healing, refused to overcome their sins and change their lives. James notes that even the demons believe and tremble before God. Having never been converted, of course, this principle should enlighten us about the professed religion of

others—being filled with awe, glorifying God, or experiencing fear, are not enough in themselves; they are merely beginnings of understanding and wisdom.

**Proverbs 9:10** The fear [or reverence] of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

So some witnesses to this miracle said, “We never saw anything like this.” Others exclaimed, “We have seen strange things today,” and they were confounded. The miracle they witnessed was one of a kind, different from anything they had ever seen before; no other gods could compare. It is amazing that they could be in awe but not have really the true understanding of anything to change their lives.

In this miracle, the incomprehensible sovereignty and glory of God, and His comfort and healing of the sick through the Son, Jesus Christ our Savior, is revealed to them. All they could be was in awe, and not do a thing about their own personal lives. But the world does not see through converted eyes. It does hear with sympathetic ears but it sees through the eyes and hears through the ears of human nature.

Now the majority of people in every period in history have been impressed with events which could be counted as miraculous, and the more spectacular those supernatural occurrences are the more humans express awe for them.

Now turn if you would please to Deuteronomy 13. Most people strongly believe that the principal way that God reveals Himself to humanity in a personal and intimate way, is through the performance of signs and wonders. And granted, God has used this method for grabbing the attention of people to Himself and His ways and to prove who He is. However, being filled with awe and experiencing fear are not enough in themselves and they are merely beginnings of understanding and wisdom. But the working of miracles alone is not always a sign that God’s power is being manifested. Moses warned the Israelites that evil forces can also produce outstanding miracles, which God at times permits in order to prove or test a person’s loyalty to Him.

**Deuteronomy 13:1-3** If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the

sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'—which you have not known—'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

The use of miracles, both those performed by God and those through evil forces, has seldom been the means by which the principles of righteousness and faith have been produced in people.

Looking at the history of the biblical times when God showered an abundance of signs and wonders among His people, the results often led to disastrous departures from the standards of righteousness and truth. It often led into departure from standards of righteousness and faith as approved by God.

Many Christian believe, “Oh if I had only lived at the time of Moses, Elijah, or Christ Himself, and would have witnessed all those miracles my faith would be so great; they would have made me far closer to God.” Well, as we go through the sermon, we will see whether that is true or not. But in reality, the signs and wonders did not make the people who lived during those times any more faithful. Actually the biblical record shows that the outcome was the very antithesis to godly obedience and virtue.

Even more significant are biblical prophecies describing a time yet future to us prior to Christ second coming when the greatest departure from true righteousness in the history of the world will take place. Chapter 13 of the book of Revelation shows that it will be produced by grand and awesome miracles among the peoples of the world.

We have to be very careful in accepting miracles as a proof of Jesus Christ or God the Father. Only the signs and wonders manifested within the righteous standards shown in the Bible can any credibility be given to them. Simply because a miracle is performed in the name of God or Christ is no guarantee that the source is the true God.

Christ Himself said,

**Matthew 7:21-23** 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!'

We see here obedience is involved here in this aspect.

**Isaiah 8:20** To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

The occurrence of miracles can be a very dangerous thing because it is so easy to deceive people into error with displays of miracles. Christ said in Matthew 12:

**Matthew 12:39** "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign [or miracle], and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

The sign of Jonah was Christ entombed for three days and three nights and His coming forth from the dead in a resurrected state. This is the only miracle any Christian should need and it is the one in which all God's people can rely upon as emanating directly from the true God of heaven.

Outward physical signs are designed to appeal to and appease worldly people who have little or no appreciation for mature spiritual teachings and experience. In almost all cases, God gave miracles to people who were just beginning to understand the first principles of the nature of the teachings of God. The people who react properly, appropriately, and beneficially to miracles are those who God is either in the process of calling or who He has called. This is true whether applied to the nation of Israel and its Old Covenant beginning during the Exodus from Egypt, or applied to the commencement of the New Testament when Jesus Christ and the apostles began to teach.

Those were times of great miracles which God provided in order to introduce brand new teachings, and also to show who He was—to show His divinity and who God the Father is. Those outpourings of signs and wonders were not intended by God to be an end in themselves, or to be of continual use among God's people. If they were then God would have persistently applied them throughout all periods of the Old Testament history, but He did not. There were many years when some of the mightiest prophets of God taught the people without one miracle being recorded. Nevertheless, when God did perform an abundance of miracles, they did little good in producing righteousness and faith in the people. Actually the opposite effect was the result.

There are three main periods of time in history when miracles were performed on a grand scale by God Himself. Each of these periods produced the greatest amount of apostasy in Israel. There will also be a time in the future before Christ's return that will bring about an even greater apostasy. These biblical periods are recorded so we can be fully aware that miracles involving the physical domain in themselves have never cultivated the development of spiritual attributes which God wants to predominate in His people. Anyone who studies the biblical revelations should be aware of these failures. But many people today forgot the biblical examples and continue to promote miracles.

The people of Israel commenced their national existence at their exodus from Egypt. As far as the performance of miracles is concerned, no time in history, past or present, ever equal that of the Exodus. Even Pharaoh became convinced that the true God was behind the miraculous events. Had not God intervened to harden Pharaoh's heart, the physical pain and punishment upon Egypt would easily have prevailed on the Egyptians to let Moses and Israel do as they pleased. God however prevented Pharaoh from succumbing to reason because He wanted to prove to all the nations of the world at that time that He was certainly behind the creation of Israel as His Old Covenant people.

**Exodus 15:14-19** "The people will hear and be afraid; sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear

and dread will fall on them; by the greatness of Your arm they will be as still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over whom You have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever." For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.

So if we were there standing there experiencing that, would it have converted us if we had not been called yet? Although God's power was fully manifested among the nations of the world, the effect on the people of Israel was not at all productive to righteousness. And notice what happened; they moved to Mount Sinai with miracle after miracle provided for them on their journey and they had miraculous food—manna—supplied to them and their clothing did not deteriorate.

**Deuteronomy 29:5** "And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet."

In addition to the daily miracles that were happening on all sides, they were even privileged to hear the voice of God Himself at Mount Sinai; they could hear the rumbling in the mountains. No large group of people throughout history has ever been so abundantly blessed with the reality of God in their presence. Yet what did these Israelites do? In the midst of all the outstanding physical miracles which surrounded their existence within the first year of the Exodus they rebelled against God on ten different occasions.

**Numbers 14:22** ". . . because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice."

It is hard for us for us to imagine. Exodus 32:10 tells us that they expressed such insubordination to God in the first year that God finally reached the

conclusion He should destroy them and raise up a nation through Moses alone. God had a right to be angry, of course. He would especially in this case. That time in history produced more physical demonstrations of God's making than any other, but the signs and wonders did little good to develop any lasting obedience and faith in the people.

In reality, the more miraculous signs and wonders that God showed them the more rebellious they became. God became so angry with Israel's lack of trust in Him after giving them miracle after miracle on a daily basis that had it not been for the intercession of Moses on their behalf, He would have obliterated the whole nation from the face of the earth.

Now if there is one thing the Exodus period proved, it showed that signs and wonders were not enough to bring righteousness and faith to a people. God was so upset with those Israelites that He ordered every Israelite above the age of twenty, except Joshua and Caleb, to die in the wilderness during those forty years. Remarkably this included even Moses himself. In spite of all the miraculous events that were manifested to Moses throughout his life, he stood up in rebellion to God at the waters of Meribah (Numbers 20:10-13). It seemed like an innocent thing at the time, but God did not take it that way at all.

If you would, please turn over to Deuteronomy 32.

**Deuteronomy 32:48-52** Then the LORD spoke to Moses that very same day, saying: "Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho; view the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel as a possession; and die on the mountain which you ascend, and be gathered to your people, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people; because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Zin, because you did not hallow Me in the midst of the children of Israel. Yet you shall see the land before you, though you shall not go there, into the land which I am giving to the children of Israel."



So if God's greatest leader of men in the history of the world became disobedient, where would we of modern times stand if God showed us the same miracles that were associated with the Exodus? We have God's Holy Spirit, as did Moses, but he still faltered. How many times do we falter as we go through life with what knowledge we have, any of the miracles we have seen and the ones we have read about? We have human nature, and it is going to keep rearing its ugly head, so we have to resist it and fight it every minute of every day.

There is no greater example of the failure of signs and wonders to produce righteousness and faith in the people than the Exodus period. Yet what do multitudes of people do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What do they desire from God? What do people today in and out of the church desire from God? They want signs and miracles in their lives. Christianity has failed to kindle true righteousness among people in the past, and it will continue to do that as long as they have the wrong focus.

However, the problems that affected the Israelites at the Exodus period did not stop there. In the time of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, God gave Israel even greater signs and wonders. Not only did they walk over the Jordan River dry-shod in the time of flood, but God even stopped the motions of the sun and moon for almost a whole day in order for Israel to win a battle over the Canaanites. It would seem logical that this would make Israelites for generations to become faithful and obedient to God. But did this occur? Well, no, it did not. They kept being as rebellious as ever.

Please turn with me to Judges 2. The next generation of Israelites after the death of Joshua and the elders, degenerated into such religious anarchy and barbarism that there is hardly a parallel to be found in the history of any nation, ancient or modern.

What it is talking about, here, is the next generation of Israelites, after the death of Joshua, continued to rebel.

**Judges 2:7-10** So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all

the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel. Now Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died when he was one hundred and ten years old. And they buried him within the border of his inheritance at Timnath Heres, in the mountains of Ephraim, on the north side of Mount Gaash. When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel.

That soon after all those miracles, they did not even know God. They probably knew *of* Him just like the demons do. The spiritual condition of the Israelites became so bad that it took almost 400 years for a resemblance of righteousness and faith to reemerge at the time of King David. Four hundred years! The eighty-year period for the reigns of David and Solomon saw Israel exalted to top position among the nations of the world.

In King David, God had a man after His own heart, and with Him Israel came into a renewed state of obedience and reverence for God and the outcome was a type of millennial existence for the whole nation in the time of Solomon. There was glory in all the world, accomplishments and architecture, economics and literature and the fine arts were produced at this time, so that even the world today admires the archeological remains of that period.

Turn to II Chronicles 7. Again, in Palestine itself, there was a period when such a measure of spirituality was restored, that most of the Psalms that have inspired people over the centuries were composed. Also the great Temple of God was built in Jerusalem. But strange as it may seem there was only one miracle of the ‘Exodus type’ that is recorded at that time—just one at the height of Israel’s obedience, righteousness, and faithfulness. That was the time that supernatural fire came down on the altar at the dedication of the Temple.

**II Chronicles 7:1** When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

Such a miracle as this was typical of the way God commences a new phase

of His teaching to the world. He introduced the sanctity of His temple by a solitary miracle of fire. There were also two miraculous judgments during that period. The plague because of David in numbering the people for war found in I Chronicles 21:14-26, and Uzzah's lack of faith for steadying the ark in II Samuel 6:1-8. However, these judgments were nothing like the Exodus-type of miracles done under Moses and Joshua.

The absence of signs and miracles in that glorious period of Israel's existence under the reigns of David and Solomon is as conspicuous as it is instructive. When people come to a full knowledge of what true spirituality really is, God not only diminishes the incidence of miraculous events, but He may stop them altogether. The examples and teachings of the scriptures indicate that the more the people adopt a spiritual approach to matters concerning God and His ways, the fewer or none at all physical demonstrations of God's powers are required by God to present His truths to people.

This is a real contrast in difference compared to what many people today think God should be doing. The biblical examples of what produces righteousness and faith in people as God has recorded in His inspired written Word, are just the opposite from what people imagine should be happening.

Now I might add that in our lives, as members of God's church, we have miracles happen in our lives every day. Our very calling and conversion is a miracle; the greatest miracle in our life. So I am not talking about those miracles done for each and every one of us as God's children.

I am talking about the ones that God has done as well as those evil ones that have been done also to the public.

I just wanted to clarify that.

The fewer the miracles that God has to perform in a person's life to get a person to love and to have faith in Him, the more he can be assured that God is pleased with him. This truth can be demonstrated so easily if a person is willing to believe the teachings of God's Word. Of all of the people mentioned in the Old and New Testaments there was no one greater than John the Baptist. He was ordained to introduce God's Son into this world.

Yet throughout all the ministry of John not one miracle was performed by him.

**John 10:41** Then many came to Him and said, "John performed no sign, but all the things that John spoke about this Man were true."

Does this show that God was not honoring John by backing up his teachings with outstanding signs and wonders? Of course not; we know that.

**Matthew 11:11** "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." [meaning John the Baptist at that time]

So as we are changed into spirit beings, when we are resurrected, we will be greater than what John the Baptist was as the greatest prophet on earth. Of course, John the Baptist will be changed with us (actually prior to us for those of us who are still living). Christ Himself said that no man in history, including Moses himself, was greater in power and esteem in God's eyes than John the Baptist, but not a single miracle was performed by John.

Many professing Christian ministers today may think this lack of miracles in John's ministry was proof that he did not have the power of God behind him, and of course they would be wrong.

Even false prophets can produce miracles. Outward demonstrations by God are only required by the spiritually weak and the rebellious. Such things excite the emotions of an evil and adulterous generation.

**Matthew 12:38-39** Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." [They were unconverted and they were a rebellious generation.] But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."

But the prominent absence of many miracles and signs of the Exodus type in the period of Israel's greatest time of glory, the reigns of David and Solomon, or during the ministry of John the Baptist, is illuminating regarding the biblical teaching. When God decides to use miracles and outstanding signs among the people, it is always among those who are infants in true spirituality or among carnal minded people who are just beginning to understand the spiritual truths. But when people start to become spiritually mature, God does not need to give a demonstration of His supernatural powers of authority to convince people to love and respect Him, because God's Holy Spirit indwelling in us, that is what does it, not something we see.

Notice that at the end of apostle Paul's ministry, physical miracles were beginning to diminish.

**II Timothy 4:20** Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick.

So Paul had left him there sick. He could have performed a miracle to heal him but he did not. He let him be sick, and we do not know what the result of that was. Only when the people were in a spiritually immature state were conspicuous miracles necessary.

Let us look at something that I think is quite interesting. Within about sixty-five years after Solomon's death the nation of Israel had degenerated into such a state of apostasy from God that the prophet Elijah was raised up to witness against them. He was succeeded by Elisha; Elijah first, then Elisha who asked for a double portion of Elijah's miraculous powers.

**II Kings 2:9** And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me."

Both men prophesied in one of Israel's greatest times of disloyalty to God. And what did God once again think was necessary to perform? He did the only thing that people who demand the outward physical demonstration of

God's power can accept. He produced a great number of miraculous signs and wonders, as many Christians wish to see today, but the miracles did no good in reforming the nation of Israel once again.

Notice the eight major miracles that Elijah performed. I am just going to list those for you with the scriptures:

1. The shutting off of heaven: I Kings 17:1
2. The oil multiplied: I Kings 17:14
3. The widow's son was raised: I Kings 17:22-23
4. The fire from heaven: I Kings 18:38
5. The rain after 3 1/2 years: I Kings 18:45
6. The fire on the first group of fifty servants: II Kings 1:10
7. The fire on the second group of fifty servants: II Kings 1:12
8. The parting of the Jordan River: II Kings 2:8

I did not want to get into each of these because it would just take too long. It would be a series of sermons.

Yet while all these miracles were being accomplished Elijah himself was convinced he was the only one left in Israel who still worshipped God correctly. Elijah thought that the performing of those miracles were as penetrating to the spiritual development of the people as water off a duck's back. He thought it would be only natural that they would react to them. This was true but God came to him with information that there were yet 7,000 people out of the whole nation who had not bent their knees to Baal.

**I Kings 19:18** "Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Baal is coming back, he is coming back as the beast with the false prophet doing miracles to promote this beast power, and it is going to fool even, if possible, the elect, because there will be such tremendous miracles. We will get to a little bit of that later.

The nation of Israel at that time had gone over to an almost outright rebellion against God during Elijah's time; this was not the end of it. Elisha succeeded Elijah to the prophetic office. He asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit as we saw, and he got it. Elijah performed eight miracles; Elisha performed sixteen.

1. Jordan was divided: II Kings 2:14
2. Water is healed: II Kings 2:21
3. Bears from the wood: II Kings 2:24
4. Water for kings: II Kings 3:20
5. Oil for the widow: II Kings 4:1-6
6. Barrenness healed: II Kings 4:16-17
7. Raising from the dead: II Kings 4:35
8. Healing of pottage: II Kings 4:41
9. Bread multiplied: II Kings 4:43
10. Naaman healed: II Kings 5:10
11. Gehazi smitten: II Kings 5:27
12. Iron to float: II Kings 6:6
13. Sight to the blind: II Kings 6:17
14. Smiting with blindness: II Kings 6:18

15. Restoring sight: II Kings 6:20

16. One miracle after death: II Kings 13:21

If you would like to know the details of those, you are welcome to look those up.

Sadly despite these signs, the thirteen kings that ruled in Israel (and it is interesting that thirteen is a number of rebellion) from the time of Elijah and Elisha until the captivity of the nation by the Assyrians almost two hundred years later, were those who did evil in the sight of the Lord. The special miraculous periods of Elijah and Elisha did nothing to correct the nation from the errors of their ways. In fact, they got worse, and were led into captivity.

Even the miracles associated with Isaiah and King Hezekiah did little to reform the nation of Judah in any lasting way. Within one hundred forty years after the captivity of Northern Israel by the Assyrians, the kingdom of Judah was taken captive by the Babylonians.

So, I wonder if the Israelitish nations today will end up in captivity for the same reason, that is, after pestilence, disease, and war takes its toll for that.

God performed two major miracles during Judah's punishment in Babylon: The fiery furnace, and the lion's den. These were done during their time of punishment for their rebellion. When God's favor came back to the nation and its restoration under the prophets Zechariah and Haggai, and the righteous administrations of Ezra and Nehemiah, not one miracle was recorded to have occurred. It was as though the period of God's pleasure during the time of David was repeated.

If there was ever a time in history when miracles were given in great abundance, it was in the time of Christ. But even those miracles and wonders did nothing to reform the nation. It did enable people to recognize who Christ was—who the Messiah was—but only a handful were called when comparing it to the total number of the nation. In fact, the outcome was that of placing their Lord and Master on a cross of crucifixion.



Not only did the nations reject Christ, but the apostles themselves fled in fear while Christ endured the agony of the cross. Those apostles had seen all those miracles that Christ did perform.

**Luke 23:49** But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a [safe] distance, watching these things.

All the signs and wonders done by Christ did little to inspire a spiritual persistence even in the apostles. Judas Iscariot saw most of the miracles Christ ever did, but betrayed Him to crucifixion. Peter himself even denied that he ever knew Christ.

I look at this as a sobering bit of information, but I do not look at it as a depressing state of the mind, because God has called us and given us His Holy Spirit, and He is dwelling in us that way. We have the power to overcome anything, and we are overcoming on a daily basis. We are making the effort, and we are trying to do the best that we can. We must try harder and do harder because what we are faced with in the future is going to really test us, so now is the time to solidify your strength and the power of the Holy Spirit in you.

John the apostle saw Christ perform His miracles, too, and what was he inspired to write about their outcome? John 12:37 says:

**John 12:37** But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him.

Turn over to Acts 5. After Christ's resurrection, the apostles performed many signs and wonders.

**Acts 5:15-16** So that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the cities surrounding Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits: and they were all healed.

Every last one of them! It does not say how many but it must have been a tremendous number. Nevertheless, as it is typical attitude of the majority of the people they were filled with anger.

**Acts 5:17** Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation.

All the good the apostles were doing in performing those miracles that Christ was actually performing through them and there were those who wanted to kill the apostles for doing good.

Look what happened inside of the church itself. In chapters 12-14 of I Corinthians Paul tells us that no area was more concerned about miracles than that of the Corinthians in Greece. They coveted the speaking in tongues and revelations and healings and the physical manifestations at which people could wonder.

You remember the reason why Simon Magus wanted the Holy Spirit. Not because He wanted Christ as his personal Savior, but because He wanted to perform magic tricks. He wanted to perform wonders and signs. It is suspected, but I do not know if that can be proven, that Simon Magus may have been the one who became the Peter of the Catholic Church, and that would make sense, because he was performing fake miracles and things like that. I do not know that for sure, but that has been the tradition the church has believed for quite a while.

But in I Corinthians 3 it tells us that the very people who desired the outward displays of the Spirit were the ones most prone to the party spirit, to the extent that Paul had to say,

**I Corinthians 3:3** For you are still carnal [speaking to the members of the Corinthian church]. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

This should shame us in God's church today; look at the churches of God, including us, and how often there has been envy, strife, and divisions; how embarrassing that is for all of us.

Even though the Corinthians had witnessed the loving signs and wonders, they still thought and acted carnally; their human reasoning tended to dominate their thinking. For example, let me give you a list of things here:

—They glorified in the abilities and accomplishments of men: I Corinthians 3:21-23

—They judged men by the standards of other men: I Corinthians 4:3-4

—They allowed such fornication—their sexual immorality—in their congregation that even the Gentiles were shocked: I Corinthians 5:1-13

—They accused one another in the civil courts, bringing lawsuits against each other: I Corinthians 6:1-8

—Some refused to support the elders financially: I Corinthians 10:14-21

—They misused the Passover service by introducing pagan ceremonies: I Corinthians 10:14-21

—They had huge feasts and even got drunk at Passover services: I Corinthians 11:19-34

Yes, there was carnality still in them. In spite of all these distractions from proper conduct the Corinthians were the ones most interested in speaking in tongues, miracles, and prophecies. The bottom line here is that all the outward manifestations of signs and wonders did not help them to straighten up their lifestyles. In reality the miraculous displays they coveted and were occurring in their midst were their excuse to continue their sins. “Well, there's miracles going on around us. Look at these miracles! We must be okay! We don't need to change! We're fine!”

As it sometimes happens today, it is virtually impossible for people who constantly experience tongues and healings and miracles and prophecies, and so on, to admit they are wrong in their ways, no matter what they do. This is because of the false assumption that God would not allow those miraculous powers to exist among them if they were not pleasing to him. What foolishness! Jannes and Jambres, in Egypt, were able to perform great signs, not because they were righteous, but by being evil. Christ Himself said that people would come in His name performing many outstanding miracles, but they would in no way be in tune with Christ by showing obedience to His will.

**Matthew 7:21-23** ‘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!’”

Now, thankfully, the Corinthians eventually heeded the warnings of Paul to straighten up their ways and minimize their emphasis on the physical exhibitions that they coveted so much. We can recognize this as the case, because in II Corinthians Paul’s only major rebuke was their continued reliance on teachings coming from false teachers. So they had apparently straightened up their other problems; at least the majority of them did, but they were still enticed by false teachers and prophets. And you say, “Well how could that have happened?” Well, it is happening in the church today; people will turn on the TV on a Sunday morning and listen to the Sunday preachers, thinking that they are getting words from the Bible, and getting spiritual teaching, but they are being led astray, being deceived, and this has gone on in God’s church for as long as I can remember. Well, you know, you are playing with fire when you are doing that.

They, the Corinthians, apparently learned the lesson concerning their erroneous emphasis on tongues, healings, miracles, and prophecies, because Paul did not mention those matters further. There is a significant point that is evident when you analyze the biblical accounts of the historical periods of

the Exodus, of Elijah and Elisha, and of Christ's ministry. While all of the miracles that occurred in those times came directly from God Himself, they still did not reform the people into spiritually-minded people.

The reason Christ made it one of His strongest points is that the only sign He would give the world that He was the Messiah was that of Jonah, and of Himself being resurrected from the dead, as I mentioned earlier.

**Matthew 12:39-40** But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

We should thank God for that one miracle, because it was a tremendous miracle, and it also is one that increases our faith when we have God's Holy Spirit, because when we keep thinking back about that it always solidifies our thinking. All of the signs and wonders, even the greatest involving the most illustrious events on earth or in heaven, fall into insignificance relative to the truth of the miracle of Christ being resurrected from the dead. We require no other miracle to prove God's existence or the truth of the biblical revelation. But we have many, many, many more proofs, do we not?

The first three periods analyzed earlier involved miracles given by God Himself which witnessed God's sovereign power but did not convert very many people at all. But there is a time coming in which miracles will once again become important and this time the majority of the people in the world will accept them.. So is that good or is that bad?

As a result, the world will become converted to do the will of a man who will claim to be Christ returning to this earth, but he will be the false Christ, an evil man who has 666 as his number, and the world will accept the dictates of this lying man for three and one-half years.

What is the main reason the world will affirm this man and his false claims? It will be an abundance of miracles that a false prophet will perform in his presence, and the world will be in awe of these miracles as presumed proof that the man must certainly be the Christ, or the Mahdi, or whatever religion

it is that somebody is waiting for their god to return. But he will be the beast—the antichrist.

**Revelation 13:11-18** Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. [How often do you hear scriptures where our God states that emphatically?] Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

Ever since that was written, people have tried to calculate that number, but God will let us know when it is the right time.

Now notice, if those in Israel were not able to learn true spirituality when God gave them His real miracles with all sufficiency in the three periods we analyzed earlier, what will happen when Satan the Devil with God's allowance turns out some of the most magnificent miracles imaginable just prior to the second coming of Christ? We just read what will happen.

Take notice. It will result in the conversion of the world to the false Christ, sitting in the temple at Jerusalem.

**II Thessalonians 2:1-6** Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask

you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

These things will come to pass in the order and the timeframe that God has chosen; not any man's, or Satan's.

**II Thessalonians 2:7-10** For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. 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 [that is, because of] 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.

Do you love the truth? I mean really love it to the point that you love reading it? You love sitting down with it and going through it and reading it and studying it? Meditating on it? If you do not, this is where you are headed. It is that serious.

As a result the world will become converted to do the will of a man and who will claim to be Christ.

**II Thessalonians 2:11** And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.

That is scary as well because if we are not doing our part, strengthening our relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ, will God give us strong delusion? Are we just doing the surface of what God requires in His church

and in obedience to Him? Are we only doing the letter of the law and not trying to learn what the spirit of the law is and doing it? We may not murder somebody, but do we hate anyone?

We may not steal outright, but in principle—have we not gotten a room here, which paid for includes the breakfast, but have a room in some other hotel or condo, and come to breakfast and eaten here free (without paying for the breakfast)? That is stealing, you know, because it was paid for as part of the room. I am just letting you know how easy it is to slip into these things. So we must be diligent.

Well, we thank God that the subterfuge will only last three and one-half years. When this time of apostasy is over, and the true Christ is on earth, mankind will have learned the lesson. The true spiritual teachings of God are not the outward signs which excite mankind so much as they do today. God wants to produce something in us far more precious and lasting than our ability to have an appreciation of His miraculous powers.

We do need to have that, but we have other things that we need that He feels is more important for us to develop. It is love for one another that we need to produce in our lives, not an appreciation for supernatural signs; after all God can cause a million openings of the Red Sea; stop the sun and moon in their orbits a billion times; but the most difficult thing for Him to do, in a sense, is to motivate us and all the intelligent beings in the universe to love one another.

Thankfully He will accomplish that, but it will not come through miracles such as raising the dead. (I am going to add a qualification on that—as I said before, our calling and our election is a miracle. So, He is, in that sense, doing it through a miracle.) But what I am saying is, the miracles that He performs is not what is doing it, as far as the stupendous miracles that we can be in awe of, even by raising the dead.

**Luke 16:31** But He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'



Miracles in and of themselves are only a transient phase in God's plan for our salvation. They have done little to establish righteousness and faith in the people in the past who were unconverted, and they will only bring about extensive apostasy in the time just prior to Christ's return to earth.

Recall that in the ministry of John the Baptist—and no prophet was greater—no great miracles occurred, yet the people began to repent. It is revealing to notice that in the ministries of the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi, Ezra, Nehemiah, or John the Baptist, not one substantial miracle is recorded to have occurred. The only righteous miracle prophesied for the future are those of the Two Witnesses mentioned in Revelation 11:1-14, and the ones associated with the day of God's wrath described in Revelation 8-16.

Yet in both periods of these godly miracles, the world fails to gain a lesson or benefit from them. After all, they will kill the Two Witnesses, and also refuse to repent of their evil ways during the day of God's wrath.

**Revelation 9:20-21** But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The world will be impressed however with the miracles accomplished by the false prophet, because they will be of a mind that is in link with Satan. Those evil miracles will look so good on the surface as though they had come from God Himself, that the whole world will go to the worship of the beast because of them. Nothing deceives so easily as miracles.

The biblical evidence shows that biblical miracles themselves, even those performed by God, have had little or no effect in creating repentance, righteousness, faith, or love in people. Yes, they have in some people but those are the people that have God's Holy Spirit. Contrary to what most people feel, miracles induce the opposite effects, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign."

Today we must be careful not to adopt the easily-enticed attitude of the early Corinthian church of emphasizing signs and wonders and prophecies and healings. The Corinthians in Paul's time thankfully eventually learned their lessons and abandoned their emphasis of signs and wonders by the time II Corinthians was written.

Will everyone in the church pay attention to Paul's admonition and reform their ways today? Probably not.

**I Timothy 4:1-2** Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.

So many people love signs and wonders way too much, and they want God to prove Himself in this way to them. Certainly the godly miracles themselves are not wrong, but when many miracles seemingly begin to occur in a person's life, an equal amount of arrogance and smugness can easily attach themselves to the recipients.

Even the apostle Paul had difficulty keeping humble, because of the abundance of signs and revelations given to him. He had to be given a thorn in the flesh to keep him in tune with the true spiritual principle of humility and faith.

**II Corinthians 12:1-10** It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ [this is Paul speaking about himself in the third person] who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. [We know the first heaven is our atmosphere, the second heaven is outer space, so to speak, and the third heaven is the throne of God.] And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my

infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

This is the way we need to look at these trials that we have. We need to look at them being for good reasons that will only make us better, and work toward our perfection. That is, helping us to keep from getting vain about things, and to be humble. That is a blessing.

So trials are a blessing for many reasons and here is one of them: Most of us simply do not know how to handle in a proper spiritual way the many miracles occurring in our lives. That is no doubt one of the reasons why they are proofs of so much failure in producing righteousness and faith among the people of the past. That is why they will do so much damage in the time of the antichrist.

For a final scripture please turn to I Corinthians 13. You already know what the chapter is; every last one of you know what I Corinthians 13 is. Certainly there are things far more important than miracles that we should be cultivating:

**I Corinthians 13:8** Love never fails.

Love never fails. Why? Because God is love and the keeping of the commandments is love; and once we get into that mode, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, His love, in a sense downloaded into us, we reflect His love. This is what happens and we have to work at it.

**I Corinthians 13:8** Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

Only when unfeigned love, kindness, consideration, fairness, mercy, and fidelity exist in our hearts will mankind realize that we do not need outward physical miracles to express righteousness and joy any longer.

One day we will all learn the lesson that God has been trying to tell humanity since the time of Adam and Eve: God loves us and wants us to love Him and to love one another, not that He wants to awe and startle us by demonstrations of His power over us and nature. Of course, God can do all things, but the most important miracle in all creation is that He sent His Son into the world to redeem us to Himself, because He loves us, and this will allow us to live with Him in joy and happiness controlling the entirety of the vast universe as His sons and daughters.

If we get our minds off the outward physical miracles and other signs and wonders, we will one day learn to appreciate what our true salvation in Christ is all about.

May God speed the day when we all learn the spirituality that the biblical revelation gives to us and that spirituality is to learn to love one another and our Creator with all our heart and if we can just do that, that is also the greatest challenge for mankind.