

---

# THE ENDING OF MIRACLES

---

(Part 1)

George Battey | 3/13/14

## QUESTIONS:

- 1) What three words are used to describe miracles in the Bible?
- 2) Which of these words are used the most and what is the significance?
- 3) What is the "*law of parsimony*"?
- 4) When God "*rested*" on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, what did this mean?
- 5) In what three ways does God interact with man?
- 6) If God were a man, how many cars would He have?
- 7) Which apostle used the word "*perhaps*"?
- 8) What were miracles always attached to?
- 9) According to the apostle Jude, what was done "*once for all*" time?

## INTRODUCTION

We sometimes hear and even say ourselves: "***Miracles never cease***" – ever heard that before? Perhaps you've said that – when something surprising happens:

- When your teenage son picks up his room.
- When the Atlanta Falcons win the Superbowl.
- When the Chicago Cubs win the pennant.

We say this mostly in jest and mostly about silly things, but is it true? Are miracles still possible and do they in fact still occur even today?

## WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

**Q:** What is a miracle?

- This is a very critical question.
- Unless we understand exactly what a miracle is, we cannot know whether they are still in existence or not.
- Some people call things "miracles" which are not miracles at all.

So ... what is a "miracle"?

Thomas H. Horne:

*An effect, or event, contrary to the established constitution or course of things, or a sensible suspension or controlment of, or deviation from, the known laws of nature, wrought either by the immediate act, or by the assistance, or by the permission of God, and accompanied with a previous notice or declaration that it is performed according to the purpose and by the power of God, for the proof or evidence of some particular doctrine, or in attestation of the authority or divine mission of some particular person.* (Introduction To The Critical Study And Knowledge Of The Holy Scriptures, 1827. I:233. Via William Brodie Crouch. The Myth Of Mormon Inspiration. Lambert Book House. 1968. p. 34).

That's all very technical. Let's analyze what Horne said.

A miracle has 5 qualities:

**1) A miracle is an event or an effect which is "SENSIBLE."**

This means miracles can be detected with the senses.

This rules out so-called "miracles" which cannot be seen or proven with the senses – e.g. *healing of internal diseases which no one knows for sure is even present.*

When true miracles were performed, they were done in the presence of enemies and the enemies could not deny that miraculous power had been displayed:

### **Acts 4:14-16**

<sup>14</sup> And **seeing the man who had been healed standing** with them, they could say nothing against it.

<sup>15</sup> But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

<sup>16</sup> saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is **evident to all** who dwell in Jerusalem, and **we cannot deny it.**

This contradicts modern-miracle-workers who refuse to work miracles in the presence of doubters saying, "*You have to have faith in order for a miracle to be performed.*"

### **2) A miracle is an event or effect in which the LAWS OF NATURE ARE EITHER VIOLATED, SUSPENDED OR CONTROLLED.**

This means miracles are not ordinary things – e.g. *the rising of the sun, the birth of a baby.*

### **Mark 4:41**

<sup>41</sup> And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that **even the wind and the sea obey Him!**"

Genuine miracles cannot be explained by natural causes.

**ILL:** A little boy's cat had kittens. He noticed they were blind. He prayed for them. Sure enough, in about 9 days they could all see. This is not a miracle.

### **3) A miracle is brought about by an IMMEDIATE ACT of God.**

This rules out "healings" which occur over the course of several days or weeks.

### **Mark 10:52**

<sup>52</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And **immediately** he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.

### **Acts 3:7**

<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and **immediately** his feet and ankle bones received strength.

#### **4) A miracle is accompanied with A PREVIOUS NOTICE that the power of God is being directly employed.**

This rules out events which men often look back on and declare to be miraculous, but which did not have a previously declared announcement that God's power was about to be utilized – e.g. *the translation of the KJV.*

### **Exodus 8:9-11**

<sup>9</sup> And Moses said to Pharaoh, "Accept the honor of saying when I shall intercede for you, for your servants, and for your people, to destroy the frogs from you and your houses, that they may remain in the river only."

<sup>10</sup> So he said, "Tomorrow." And he said, "Let it be according to your word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God.

<sup>11</sup> And the frogs shall depart from you, from your houses, from your servants, and from your people. They shall remain in the river only."

Here is an announcement prior to the miracle itself – in order to confirm God's power was being employed.

#### **5) A miracle is for the purpose of CONFIRMING the truthfulness of a doctrine or the divine mission of a particular person.**

This rules out events which are not directly tied to the confirmation of a particular doctrine or a particular person's divine mission – e.g. "*miracles*" which are supposedly wrought directly by God without the agency of any man – disconnected totally from confirming anything.

### **Mark 16:20**

<sup>20</sup> And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

We will talk about this "confirmation" element in a moment.

The Bible uses three words to describe these unusual events:

**Acts 2:22**

<sup>22</sup> "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by **miracles, wonders, and signs** which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know;

These three words all refer to the same thing, but three words are used to emphasize three different aspects of what was done:

- **Miracles** – because they could not be explained by natural laws.
- **Wonders** – because they caused everyone who saw it to "wonder" and marvel at what had happened.
- **Signs** – because these events were indicators pointing to something.

This last expression is particularly important. It is used more than any of the other expressions:

- **"Miracles"** – either plural or singular – occurs 16 times in the English Bible
- **"Wonders"** – either plural or singular – occurs 95 times.
- **"Signs"** – either plural or singular – occurs **203 times**.

The primary purpose of miraculous manifestations were to point to something.

(We'll say more about this later.)

**THE GENERAL TENOR**

The general tenor of God's involvement with His creation has historically been to move from the miraculous to the non-miraculous.

**EXAMPLE:** When God created the earth, He did so using miracles.

There were no "natural laws" in the beginning – they had to be created. But after everything was created God "rested."

### **Genesis 2:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.

<sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and **He rested** on the seventh day **from all His work which He had done.**

<sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it **He rested from all His work which God had created and made.**

"Rested" does not mean He "took a break" and did absolutely nothing.

### **John 5:16-17**

<sup>16</sup> For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.

<sup>17</sup> But Jesus answered them, "**My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.**"

Jesus was saying that when the Father "rested" on the seventh day, He wasn't taking a total break. If God completely relaxed and used none of His power at all, the entire universe would dissolve.

### **Hebrews 1:3**

<sup>3</sup> [speaking of Jesus] who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and **upholding all things by the word of His power**, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

God's power constantly holds the world together and keeps the universe operating and without it we would disintegrate.

When the scriptures say that "**God rested**" it means **He ceased His creative work.** Nothing else was created.

God intended that His creation would now operate thru "**natural law.**" He intended that:

- Trees would bear fruit containing seeds that would reproduce after their kind – naturally (Gen 1:11).
- Animals would reproduce naturally after their kind (Gen 1:22).
- Man and woman would reproduce naturally.

The creation would be held together by the "word of His power," but His power would be displayed thru **natural law**.

### **NATURAL LAW HONORED**

God respected and honored the natural law which He created. Never again would He create plants, or animals, or man. All of these would reproduce by natural law.

By the time of Noah the world had become so corrupt that God decided to destroy all flesh which had the "breath of life" – land dwelling creatures.

He was not going to re-create everything, however. He found Noah to be a righteous man and he would save Noah and two of all the animals – intending that they would repopulate the earth naturally.

When the flood was over:

#### **Genesis 8:15-17**

<sup>15</sup> Then God spoke to Noah, saying,

<sup>16</sup> "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you.

<sup>17</sup> "Bring out with you every living thing of all flesh that is with you: birds and cattle and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, so that they may abound on the earth, and **be fruitful and multiply** on the earth."

**Q:** Could God have destroyed everything and started over?

**R:** Of course He could. We are not questioning the power of God. But, rather, we are trying to examine God's mode of operation.

We are not questioning what God could or could not do, but rather what He **did** and **did not** do.

From our examination of the creation and then the flood we see this:

- God used miraculous power to get things started.
- He used natural law to keep things going from that point onward.
- He never intervened miraculously when natural law could accomplish His purposes.

**NOTE:** God never worked a miracle that was unnecessary. This is called "*the law of parsimony*" – sparing energy.

God never performed miracles needlessly. You can never point to a miracle and say, "There was no need for this miracle. It was a senseless act."

## **THE DIVINE ECONOMY**

God interacts with His creation in more than one way. Some people want to limit God.

**NOTE:** I get tired of people accusing me of "limiting God" when I am simply making observations about how God operates. I notice in the scriptures that God generally moves from the miraculous to the non-miraculous and people accuse me of "limiting God."

The ones guilty of "*limiting God*" are those who think God can only interact with man in a miraculous way.

**Q:** Why do they want to limit God like this?

- Is He not capable of interacting with man in other ways?
- Non-miraculous ways?



God, in fact, interacts with man in three ways:

- **Naturally**
- **Providentially**
- **Miraculously**

Let's briefly examine each of these.

## **NATURAL LAW**

### **FIRST: Natural law.**

God created natural law. He respects and honors that law. He did not create natural law just to turn around and violate it needlessly and recklessly.

If natural law is enough to accomplish His purposes, then this is enough! God does not needlessly waste energy – working miracles when miracles are not necessary. He is not extravagant. If God were a man:

- ***He would have only one car*** – or He would have no car at all and would take the bus. (He certainly would not have a collection of 5 flashy cars.)
- ***He would have only one house*** – if He had a house at all. (He would not have a large fancy house in one state and a vacation resort on the coast.)
- ***He would have only a few clothes*** – if He had more than one change of clothes. (He would not likely have a closet bulging with clothes.)

**Q:** How do you know all of this? Isn't this pretty presumptuous?

I know because I look at the Lord when He was alive on the earth.

- He lived a humble life.
- He did not live in extravagance.
- He did not teach or do unnecessary things.

### **John 14:9**

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Everything He did was conservative. He did not work miracles just to be flashy. Everything He did was absolutely necessary.

### **Mark 8:11-13**

<sup>11</sup> Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him.

<sup>12</sup> But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."

<sup>13</sup> And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side.

Why didn't the Lord work more miracles? Because enough had already been worked! He did not needlessly work miracles. He did only what was necessary.

### **Luke 16:27-31**

<sup>27</sup> "Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house,

<sup>28</sup> 'for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

<sup>29</sup> "Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

<sup>30</sup> "And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

<sup>31</sup> "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.'"

Why wasn't Lazarus allowed to return to the brothers and warn them? Because they had enough resources already to be converted. This would have been a waste of divine energy. It would have been a needless miracle.

***This is the way His Father operates.*** Jesus came to reveal His father. We know how the Father governs the world by observing how Jesus lived His life.

So, when we pray:

## **Matthew 6:11**

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread.

The Lord is going to answer that prayer in the least extravagant way possible. If He can answer this prayer by natural law only, that is how it will occur.

On rare occasions God would answer this prayer miraculously (the widow's cruse of oil). Why did He use miracles on this occasion?

- Because there was a famine going on and crops weren't growing.
- Because He wanted everyone to know that Elijah was not just an ordinary man. **(sign)**

But ordinarily God answers this prayer for bread by natural law:

- We get up and go to work.
- We earn our money.
- We buy our bread.

God answered that prayer thru natural means.

**Q:** Was He involved in the process?

**R:** He was!

**Q:** Did He interact with man?

**R:** He interacted!

We cannot limit God. He can, if He so chooses, to interact with man non-miraculously and, in fact, this is His normal mode of operation.

## **PROVIDENCE**

(How does God interact with man?)

### **SECOND: Providence.**

This is non-miraculous. This is God operating thru natural law, but arranging things in such a way that His purposes are carried out.

***Providence is a step above natural law alone, but it is a step below the miraculous.*** If natural law alone had been in operation, things would not have turned out the way God wanted. God intervened and arranged things so that His purposes were accomplished.

**NOTE:** Providence is used only when natural law does not accomplish God's purpose. He does not needlessly, and extravagantly exercise His power in this way.

Providence is seen in the life of:

#### **1) Joseph.**

Had God not intervened, Joseph would have been killed by his brothers. But God intervened in such a way that His purposes were carried out exactly as He wanted.

Since providence is merely an arrangement of events thru natural law, men do not know that it is occurring.

- The brothers just "happened" to see a caravan of traders going to Egypt at "just the right time"
- Potiphar just "happened" to buy Joseph as a slave
- The baker and butler just "happen" to be in prison at the same time Joseph was
- The butler just "happened" to remember Joseph when Pharaoh needed an interpretation to his dream

Because providence operates thru natural law, only an inspired prophet can determine when it is actually occurring.

### **Genesis 50:20**

<sup>20</sup> "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

How could Joseph say such a thing? Because he was an inspired prophet.

Providence is seen in the life of:

## **2) Esther.**

Had God not intervened, His people would have been exterminated. There would have been no Jewish nation left for God to work out His plans of saving man thru Jesus. God had to intervene like this because:

- Natural law would not accomplish His purposes.
- Providence was the least extravagant way for Him to accomplish His plans.

Only two books in the Bible do not mention God – Esther is one of them. (Song of Solomon is the other). Yet, even though God's name is not mentioned, you know He's behind the scenes causing things to work out like they're going.

- Queen Vashti just "happened" to get dethroned.
- Mordecai just "happened" to save the king from some assassins.
- Esther just "happens" to find favor with the chief of the eunuchs.
- Esther just "happens" to be chosen as the new queen.
- The king "for some strange, unknown reason" can't sleep one night and calls for the chronicles to be read to him.

God's hand was in all of this. But Mordecai and Esther didn't know what was going on. Neither of them were prophets. This is why Mordecai responded like he did:

### **Esther 4:14**

<sup>14</sup> "For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. **Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"**

Amazingly, people today (who are not prophets) are declaring that God is providentially behind everything that happens in their lives.

- "God lead me to meet the woman who later became my wife."
- "I'm waiting to see what college God will lead me to attend."
- "God is leading me to start a baseball team."

How can men speak so confidently like this? How do they know God is behind all of this?

Even the apostle Paul, who was obviously inspired, didn't always know when God was working providentially:

### **Philemon 1:15**

<sup>15</sup> For **perhaps** he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever,

Obviously providence is not miraculous display of God's power. When miracles occurred, there was no doubt that a miracle had occurred!

**One more thing about providence: *Just because God providentially operates in someone's life, it does not mean that they are saved.***

- God providentially put Pharaoh on the throne, but Pharaoh was not saved.

### **Exodus 9:16**

<sup>16</sup> "But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.

### Summary:

- Providence is a step above natural law.
- **It is not God's normal mode of operation.**
- It is used only when natural law cannot accomplish God's purposes.
- **Providence did not necessarily imply that a person was saved.**
- Providence is not miraculous.
- Only an inspired prophet can know when providence is being used.
- Even prophets themselves cannot know if providence is in operation unless God specifically tells them so.

### **2 Kings 4:27**

<sup>27</sup> Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, she caught him by the feet, but Gehazi came near to push her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone; for her soul is in deep distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me."

Prophets know only what God reveals to them.

### **1 Corinthians 2:11**

<sup>11</sup> For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

Men who are not inspired prophets should be less dogmatic about attributing things to the providence of God. Like Paul, we should be saying, "***Perhaps ...***"

## **MIRACLES**

(How does God interact with man?)

**THIRD: Miracles.**

***Miracles are a step above providence and two steps above natural law.*** Miracles were used when neither natural law, nor providence could accomplish God's purposes.

As we have already noted, miracles were more often called "signs" in the Bible because they were pointing to something.

***Miracles always had some connection with new revelation.***

### **Exodus 4:1-8**

<sup>1</sup> Then Moses answered and said, "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The LORD has not appeared to you.'"

<sup>2</sup> So the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A rod."

<sup>3</sup> And He said, "Cast it on the ground." So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail" (and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand),

<sup>5</sup> "that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

<sup>6</sup> Furthermore the LORD said to him, "Now put your hand in your bosom." And he put his hand in his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow.

<sup>7</sup> And He said, "Put your hand in your bosom again." So he put his hand in his bosom again, and drew it out of his bosom, and behold, it was restored like his other flesh.

<sup>8</sup> "Then it will be, if they do not believe you, nor heed the message of the first sign, that they may believe the message of the latter sign.

Moses was coming with a new revelation – for Israel and for Pharaoh. He needed some way to demonstrate that he was sent by God.

### **Exodus 4:29-31**

<sup>29</sup> Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel.

<sup>30</sup> And Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people.

<sup>31</sup> So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped.



This can be demonstrated over and over again. ***Miracles were for a "sign" attached to a new revelation indicating authenticity.***

- Miracles were the "copyright" mark of new revelation.
- Miracles were the "trademark" tag indicating authenticity. (E.g. "NFL," "NBA")

Because they indicated authenticity, they had to be clear and undeniable. There could be no mistake about it.

### **Exodus 8:18-19**

<sup>18</sup> Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but **they could not**. So there were lice on man and beast.

<sup>19</sup> Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "**This is the finger of God.**" But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said.

There was a point that the magicians could not reproduce the miracles which Moses was doing.

Bible miracles were things which men could see:

- They were not the "healing" of cancers
- Migraine headaches
- Backaches
- Kidney problems

### **Acts 2:6-12**

<sup>6</sup> And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.

<sup>7</sup> Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?"

<sup>8</sup> "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"

<sup>12</sup> So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "**Whatever could this mean?**"

- Men could hear and understand these "tongues" which were being spoken.

- The tongues were a "sign" pointing to something – "Whatever could this mean?" – the people understood correctly that this had a meaning behind it.
- The meaning was that these men were commissioned from heaven with a message for the people.

### **Acts 2:32-33**

<sup>32</sup> "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.

<sup>33</sup> "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now **see** and **hear**.

### **John 3:1-2**

<sup>1</sup> There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

<sup>2</sup> This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for **no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.**"

### **Mark 16:20**

<sup>20</sup> And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and **confirming the word** through the accompanying signs.

New revelation needs a mark of authenticity.

- Miracles were not to prove to an individual person he was personally saved (1 Cor 12:7).
- They were not given only to heal people so no one would get sick and die.
- They were not given to relieve men of their burdens and responsibilities.

Miracles were tied with new revelation.

## **MIRACLES HAVE CEASED**

The reason I say "***miracles have ceased***" is because new revelation is no longer being given. The Lord revealed "all truth" to His apostles and once it was revealed, confirmed, and written down, the need for miracles would end.

**REMEMBER:** God does not perform needless miracles. When the need is gone, there will be no extravagant displays of power.

### **John 16:13**

<sup>13</sup> "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into **all truth**; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

### **2 Peter 1:3**

<sup>3</sup> as His divine power has given to us **all things** that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,

### **Jude 3**

<sup>3</sup> Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for **the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints**.

With the deliverance of all truth came the ending of miracles which were designed to confirm new revelation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Just because I say God is no longer performing miracles does not mean I'm saying God no longer interacts with His people. **He interacts!** But He interacts in ways short of the miraculous.

- Thru natural law
- Thru providence (which is not miraculous)
- Thru His revealed law

**We must be cautious:** When men begin to ask for miracles, it is not evidence of faith, but evidence of lack of faith. (See Ex 17:1-7. Notice v7 in particular.)