

# The BEACON

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## The Purpose of Miracles

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It is sometimes argued that no church could be the right church unless its members have miraculous endowments. The Bible records numerous examples of miracles being performed in the apostolic church. Some contend, therefore, that miraculous manifestations constitute one of the distinguishing characteristics of the true church of Jesus Christ. In other words, if a twentieth-century congregation cannot display such supernatural gifts as speaking in tongues, healing the sick, and prophesying, it is not the Lord's church.

I propose at this time to briefly investigate the subject of miraculous manifestations, pointing out a few facts which should be both interesting and educational. This article will deal with the purpose of miracles; a future discussion will explore the duration of miracles.

Many people talk about miraculous works who have never stopped to give even a moment's thought to what a miracle really is. Common sense would suggest that we cannot understand what the Bible teaches on the subject of miracles if we do not know what a miracle is. Let us begin, then, by defining the word miracle. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary says a "miracle" is "An event or effect in the physical world deviating from the known laws of nature, or transcending our knowledge of these laws." Again, Webster says, "Miraculous implies the direct intervention of supernatural (esp. divine) agency." From this definition it may be observed: (1) that a mystery is not identical to a miracle; (2) that something unusual is not necessarily a miracle; and (3) that tricks are not miracles.

Now the word "miracle" is often used in a secondary sense to refer to things wonderful, mysterious, and out of the ordinary; but correctly speaking, a miracle is a supernatural occurrence. A thing might be marvelous, unusual, and mysterious, yet not deviate from the known laws of nature, hence not be a miracle in the strict sense of the term.

According to the Scriptures all things originated by miracle. The first chapter of Genesis records the world's creation. God spoke, and order arose out of chaos. The Lord said, "Let there be light: and there was light." It was not necessary for God to set up an experiment station and test various theories in an effort to bring light out of darkness. His supernatural power brought light into existence at His command. By His word the heavens, the earth, light, life, and all things came into existence. The material world originated by miracle, but it is perpetuated by law. The first man was made "of the dust of the ground." (Gen. 2:7.) Not one man has been made that way since. The first woman was made from a rib taken from man. (Gen. 2:22.) But no man has received a wife since that time in the manner that Adam received his bride. Life originated by miracle but is given perpetual existence by natural law which God set into operation.

Now, just as the material world originated by miracle, so did Christianity. The Savior was introduced into the world by means of a miracle. When Mary, a virgin, was espoused to Joseph, "before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. 1:18.) The virgin birth is the most logical of all ways for God to manifest Himself in human form. On His mother's side Jesus was human; on His father's side He was divine, But this conception in the womb of Mary without any sort of human intervention or assistance is contrary to all the known laws of nature, hence a miracle of the most remarkable kind! And this

Jesus, conceived by supernatural agency, worked miracles to demonstrate His supernatural character. He did not confine His miraculous manifestations to a restricted area. He showed a wide range of authority by healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, loosing the tongues of the dumb, causing the lame to walk, and restoring missing limbs to the maimed. He proved that He had power over the material world by turning water to wine and by multiplying bread. He even demonstrated power over death and the grave by raising people who had died, and His own resurrection is the miracle of all miracles.

Why did Christ work these miracles? There is no indication that Christ ever worked any sort of a miracle just for the sake of doing something supernatural. Jesus did not heal sick folks merely because He loved them and wanted to see them well. If that had been the case He would have healed all the sick of His generation. He did not raise the dead solely because others wanted them to live. In the working of miracles Jesus had one overall purpose: to prove His divinity. Christianity is built on the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. In working miracles to establish His Sonship, Jesus was laying the foundation for the religion of which He is author. When in Capernaum, Christ healed a man sick of the palsy. Prior to that He said to the man, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." Jesus was criticized and charged with blasphemy by the scribes. He replied, "Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." (Mk. 2:1-12.) Why was this man healed? To prove that Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins. When Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus, he remarked, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." (John 3:1,2.) Nicodemus saw proof in Jesus' miracles that God was with Him.

Our Lord said He had a greater witness than that of John, His harbinger, "for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." (John 5:36.) Near the close of his record of the life of Christ, the apostle John remarked, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30-31.) It would be difficult to find a clearer expression of the definite purpose for which Christ worked miracles and the specific reason why these things were recorded. The miracles of the Messiah were to establish His claim and furnish grounds for believing in Him.

In addition to the miracles of Christ, the New Testament tells of miracles performed by the apostles and others in the early days of Christianity. Is there any indication of the purpose behind these miracles? Let us turn to Mark 16 and begin reading with verse 15. Jesus told the apostles to "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe (He did not say all believers shall perform these signs, but that the signs would follow the believers.—I. H.) In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing,

it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Why did the Lord promise these signs? In order that they might confirm what they preached! The New Testament was not then written, so the early Christians could not cite book, chapter, and verse as we can today. They needed some means of confirming their message. That was the express purpose for which they received miraculous endowments.

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) the apostles spoke in other tongues, "as the Spirit gave them utterance." The people were amazed, "because that every man heard them speak in his own language." Today some people claim to speak in tongues, but when they do nobody understands them. When the apostles spoke in tongues, all understood, each in his own language. This showed the people that these were not ordinary men, but rather men under the influence of divine power. "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not..." (1 Cor. 14:22.) Some modern religionists claiming the gift of tongues tell us we could understand if we believed, but the Bible says "tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."

In our next number I shall undertake to show why miracles are not performed by Christians today. The Bible is as clear in its teaching on the duration of miracles as on the purpose for which they were performed.

to be continued... (Apostolic Doctrine Jan. 1960)

## **“REMEMBER ME O GOD FOR GOOD”**

(Nehemiah 13:31)

Nehemiah was a leader. He knew how to organize the people and get the most out of them. As a devout and concerned Jew he was granted the task of going back to Jerusalem and taking care of a job that had remained dormant too long. He entered Jerusalem and first surveyed the damage and made note of what needed to be done. He then called a gathering of the people and urged them to get to the job at hand with his rallying speech "let us rise up and build." The work was begun and about 53 days later, it was completed. Nehemiah dealt with many other challenges during his time in Jerusalem among the people. In chapter 5 he dealt with those who took advantage of their brethren by cheating them with high interest rates. Nehemiah showed how to deal with troublemakers in many encounters with Tobiah, Sanballat and Geshem. He chastised those who would fraternize with the enemy in chapter 6:17-19 and went on to organize the people in chapter 7. The Feast of Tabernacles is observed at the watergate as the worship life of the people is pursued. Nehemiah makes public confession of the sins of the people in chapters 9 and 10. In chapters 11 and 12 Nehemiah makes sure the walls are dedicated and the Levites are supported properly. He stops those who would break the Sabbath laws and deals with those who have mixed marriages in chapter 13. This wonderful man of God did many great things for God and his people. He spent himself in many efforts to encourage the people to do God's will. It cost him financially, physically and emotionally, but he was willing and ready to pay the price. The task was worth it. In the last verse of Nehemiah, he asks in his customary prayers to God, that God remember him for good. His desire was that the Lord remembers all the good things he did. This great leader's life counted for good things. What can be said of your life? What are the good things you are doing for the Lord and His people that would give the Lord reason to remember you for good? Are you showing enough evidence that you are His servant for Him to recognize your claim to belong to Him?

1. Are you present at all services? Consider Hebrews 10:25
2. Are you truly interested in teaching your friends, family and neighbors the truth? See Mark 16:15,16.
3. Are you sincerely dedicated to living a godly life separate from worldly, sinful lusts? See Galatians 5:19-21.
4. Are you growing, as you should as a Christian? See Hebrews 5:12-14.
5. Are you preparing yourself to serve to an even greater degree in the Lord's church?
6. Are you truly studying, praying and living, as you should?
7. Do you truly "love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind?"
8. Are you following Colossians 3:23- "whatever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men."

Is there enough good in us, good reader for us to be able to pray the prayer that Nehemiah prayed? What does your life count for at this point? What is most memorable about you and the life you have given in service to the Lord at this point? Have we served as Nehemiah?

There is still a great work of constant rebuilding of the walls of spiritual Jerusalem and the Lord need those who will step up and accept the responsibility of leadership of His people. He still needs good elders and deacons to go about the job of "rising up and building." He needs men who will look out for dangers at the same time they are building the walls. He needs men who are watchful and wise, those who know the difference in a true threat and a silly attempt at thwarting the great work that must be accomplished.

The Lord needs preachers who love Him above any material considerations. He needs men who will speak the truth because they love it and because it must be told. He needs men who love the people and the cause of the Lord enough to spend and be spent in labor in the kingdom. He needs members in local congregations who truly want to work and search and long for better ways they can serve and improve in their labor for the Lord.

The Lord needs those who will worship sincerely and with fervency. He needs brethren who not so concerned about the timing of the services that they lose sight of the value of the precious message being presented to the people. He needs people with a servant spirit, who will change their lives when the Word is presented. He needs listeners who listen with a view to change what is wrong and pursue what is right.

God needs people who will put away the strange ways of the world and live pure and holy before him in devotion and dedication to His ways and His will.

Are you living the good life for God? If not, what will you do to change?

Will you do better in 2006 than you did in 2005? Will you determine as Joshua did in Joshua 24- "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord." Will you be the leader in our home, on your job and in the church that God wants you to be? Will you challenge yourself to greater things? Great men and women, never realize their greatness and value. Nehemiah was a man that stepped up and served out of love for the Lord and His people. He did not strive to be great and ultimately he did not ask God to remember him as great, just **good**. ---SWA---

**□ Your soul is important to us □**

**If you would like to set up a study, or if we can help you in any way,  
please contact us.**