

Miracles and Miraculous Abilities in the New Testament and Today

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Should We Expect Miraculous Abilities Today?

The way this question is worded is very important. We are not asking about miracles in general, but miraculous ABILITIES. A miracle refers to God intervening in the world so that what happens is not what would happen if things happened the way they normally do according to the laws of nature (God oversees the laws of nature so they are the normal way manages things on earth; a miracle is thus God deciding to do something different than the way He normally does them through the laws of nature). And in response the prayers of His people God can and does perform miracles. Miraculous ABILITIES, however, refer to the kinds of abilities we see in the apostles and a few others in the book of Acts to whom Jesus endowed the authority to perform miracles like healing at their command. The question we're asking here is should we *expect* that people today still have those ability.

And the word *expect* is critical as well. We're not asking if can bestow those abilities. We're not even asking if God does ever bestow them. Certainly God can do whatever He wants (it's His world after all!). What we're asking is, based on what we see in the NT, should we think that God will or must bestow them. Does the NT teach or show that people all throughout church history will be given those kinds of abilities?

- I. This seems unlikely in view of the PURPOSE of miracles in general.
 - A. Miraculous ABILITIES were primarily intended to confirm God's revelation through his authorized spokesmen.
 1. Mark 2:10
 2. John 10:37-38
 3. John 20:30-31
 4. Heb 2:3-4
 - B. God is not doing today the things that He seems to always be doing when such ABILITIES are generally given. Since they are intended to be confirming signs, miraculous ABILITIES are not found at random or continuously throughout Bible history. Rather they are part of a larger package of things which includes:
 - a) Redemptive events--acts of God designed to save people from sin
 - b) Revelation--words of God to explain what He is doing
 - c) Miracles--signs to confirm His revelation
 - C. Thus we see miraculous ABILITIES concentrated in three eras in the Bible with hundreds of years between them. This indicates that they were not happening "all the time."
 1. Moses and the Exodus (1500 BC)
 2. The OT prophets (800-500 BC)
 3. Jesus and the Apostles (AD 30-60)

- II. This seems unlikely because the implied pattern of passing those miraculous ABILITIES through the laying on of the apostles' hands is no longer possible. This is not 100% clear but it does seem implied in the text. In the earliest days of the church, though thousands were being baptized and were receiving the Holy Spirit, only the apostles are said to perform miracles. Later, after the apostles begin laying their hands on people to commission them to ministry, do others perform miracles, and even then, only two or three other people are recorded as having done them.

PEOPLE SAID TO HAVE DONE MIRACLES

PEOPLE SHOWN DOING MIRACLES

2:22--Jesus

2:43--apostles

5:12--apostles

6:8--Stephen

8:6, 13--Philip

14:3--Paul (Barnabas)

19:11--Paul

3:6-7--Peter

9:17-18, (12)--Ananias to Paul

9:34--Peter

9:40-41--Peter

13:11--Paul

14:10--Paul

20:10-11--Paul

This explains why the apostle Paul describes miraculous ABILITIES as “signs of an apostle” (2 Corinthians 12:12). These abilities were closely associated with the apostles and their associates.

These last two reasons are secondary and not as important as the first two. Nevertheless, they do contribute to the picture we see throughout the NT.

- III. This seems unlikely because Paul says that miraculous ABILITIES were not meant to be a permanent part of God's plan in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. The question in this passage is, when is the end point? It says the end point is when “that which is perfect” or “that which is complete” comes. But what is that? And scholars are divided over what that means. So the most we can say for certain from this text is that miraculous abilities were meant to be temporary.

Personally, I think the end point is probably during the present time because when those things cease, faith, hope, and love remain. Faith will become sight when Jesus returns. Hope will be achieved when Jesus returns. So those things won't remain at that point. So in my opinion whatever “that which is perfect/ complete” refers to, it must come while faith and hope still remain.

- IV. This seems unlikely because church history records that in the second century miraculous ABILITIES were passing away in the church. The only major claims to miraculous ABILITIES came through a radical heretical group known as the Montanists. The church leaders in the second century (the time period immediately following the apostles) speak of the kinds of miraculous ABILITIES described in the NT as “fading away” and “ceasing.”