

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

“THE USE OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, James Gravelle.

“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (Jn. 20:30-31). Welcome to the Gospel of Christ. We are happy that you have chosen to be with us for our study on the use of miracles in the Bible. The word “miracle” is the general term for the phenomenon that accompanied the Jewish and Christian revelation—especially at critical moments. What I mean by that is this. At special times in history, God needed to prove beyond any shadow of doubt that He was in charge, and that those who were speaking on His behalf had His authority to do so. Such times include the giving of the law to Moses, and the change from both Patriarchal and Mosaical laws when Christ died on Calvary. Beyond any doubt, miracles are works of God. You may remember that in the Book of Exodus the children of Israel were in bondage to the Egyptians. God sent Moses to Pharaoh with the message, “Let My people go!” In order to prove to Pharaoh that it was indeed the God of Heaven and Earth Who was making this demand, Moses was given the power to work miracles. Notice Exodus 7:3—“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.” After the Israelites had been delivered from Egypt, and after they had wandered for forty years in the wilderness, they were making preparations to conquer the land of Canaan. Again, to prove that it was God Who had authorized such an action, and to prove to Israel that it was God Who was doing the speaking, we read in Deuteronomy 4:34-35, “Did God ever try to go and take for Himself a nation from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him.”

In the New Testament, it became clear to those who had the eyes to see that Jesus did things that were beyond the power of any mortal man. Nicodemus was one of the people who witnessed the miracles that Christ performed. In John 3:2 we read, “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.’” On another occasion, Jesus explained to His disciples that because **anyone** could speak impressive words, they should believe only those who had the proof that they spoke for God. In John 10:37-38 we read, “If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him.” The Bible uses various terms to refer to what we today call “miracles.” One class of terms points out the unusual, exception, and striking character of such works—as we see in Acts 2:22, where Peter said, “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.” Here, Peter explained why those who were present in Jerusalem on that occasion should accept Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. He and the other apostles would prove to the people who were present that they

had the same power, and thus the same proof, that Jesus did because they, too, were God's spokesmen. They could prove—beyond any shadow of doubt—that they spoke the truth. Notice Acts 2:43—“Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” Other terms used in the Bible for miracles stress the power that was displayed, as in Matthew 11:20-24,

“Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.’”

Jesus made it clear that the miracles He performed were beyond man's ability to disprove, and that others should understand that the things that He and His disciples had done proved that He is the Son of God. The works He did spoke for themselves. And those who witnessed His miracles had no excuse for not obeying Him.

Other Bible terms give prominence to the purpose of miracles. Jesus' first miracle was in the small Galilean town of Cana where, at a wedding feast, He turned water into wine. In John 2:11 we read, “This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.” This sign or miracle proved to His disciples that Jesus had power beyond what nature alone would allow. The purpose of this miracle was not simply to prove that Jesus possessed such power. Rather, it went beyond that in order to prove that what Jesus said was undeniably the truth. As a result, His disciples believed in Him. In Acts 3, Peter and John were going to the temple in Jerusalem. They encountered a man who had been lame from birth, and who was asking alms of the people who passed by. Although Peter did not have any money to give to the man, he did give the man something beyond his greatest expectations. Peter told him in Acts 3:6, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” And the man did! The man stood up, walked, and leaped! This man had never taken a step in his life, yet by the power of God, and through the name of Jesus Christ, he not only was totally cured, but also was given the power and ability to move as if he had done so his entire life. Today, even with our modern medical science, if there is someone who has to be bedfast for any period of time, that person has to go through a rehabilitation process in order to walk again. But this was not the case with a miracle performed by someone who had been authorized by God to work such a miracle so that people could witness the results of that miracle.

With this understanding of what miracles were, we now can say that through miracles the power of God could be seen. One of the best examples of how miracles were used is found in 1 Kings 18. Ahab was king of Israel—and he was not at all a good king! Elijah was a prophet of God. There was a meeting of the two—and a showdown was inevitable. Ahab charged Elijah with being the “troubler of Israel” (vs. 17). But Elijah answered, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals” (vs. 18). Elijah then set the stage in verse 19 where we read, “Now therefore, send and gather all Israel to me on Mount Carmel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table.” Ahab did as Elijah had suggested, and the people gathered at Mount Carmel. In verse 21 Elijah asked the Israelites, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” The people needed more than just Elijah's words to give them a reason to choose God or Baal. So, Elijah offered a challenge. He explained that he alone would stand against the 450 prophets of Baal. Elijah told the people to bring to bulls as a sacrifice. The prophets of Baal were

to dress one of them and place the pieces on top of the wood that had been arranged on their altar. They were not to put any fire to it, but they were to instead call upon their god to do so. They did this. They cried out from the morning until the time of the Israelites' evening sacrifice, they called upon their god. At noon Elijah mocked them, telling them to cry louder since their god may be busy, on a trip, or perhaps sleeping. Thus, the people cried even louder. And, they even cut themselves so that their blood spilled out of their bodies. But there was nothing but silence. There was nothing to indicate that a god was listening to them.

Then, as evening came, Elijah called all the people to draw near to him. He took twelve stones (one for each of the tribes of Israel) and used them to repair the altar. He placed wood on it, took the bull, dressed it, and then placed it, too, on the altar. To make sure that the people understood the power of God, Elijah instructed them to dig a trench around the altar. So they did. He then told them to fill four water pots with water—which they did. He told them to pour the water over the sacrifice, the wood, and the altar—and they did. He told them to repeat this process a second time—and they did. He told them to do it a third time—and they did. When they finally had finished this process, the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones were soaked with water, and the trench was filled with water. Notice, however, the reason for Elijah's requests. In verse 36 Elijah said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel and I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your word." Verses 38-39 then state, "Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!'" Thus, through miracles we see the power of God.

Through miracles we also see the deity of Christ. I opened this lesson by quoting John 20:30-31—"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." The miracles of Jesus began with His power to control nature—as was evinced in His miracle at the wedding feast in Cana where He turned water into wine (Jn. 2:11). We also see Jesus healing a nobleman's son in John 4:46. He healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14-15). We see Jesus healing a leper (Mt. 8:2-4). We see Him healing a paralytic (Mt. 9:2-8). We see Him healing a withered hand (Mt. 12:9-14). Jesus made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk. We even see Jesus raising the dead back to life. In Luke 7:11-17 He raised the son of the widow from Nain. In Luke 8, He raised the daughter of Jairus. And, in John 11 He raised Lazarus from the dead. Notice that in this account Jesus explained that because of Lazarus' death, Christ's disciples would come to believe in Him all the more. After Jesus told them that Lazarus was dead, Jesus said, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe" (Jn. 11:15). Jesus told His disciples that He was glad that Lazarus was dead. Why?! He was glad so that He could use this occasion to generate belief in His disciples regarding His deity. You probably know the story about how Lazarus had already been in the tomb decaying for four days. In John 11:43-44 we read, "Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And he who had died came out, bound hand and foot with grave clothes." What was the outcome of this miracle? Verse 45 records, "Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and who had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him." Jesus truly had out-of-this-world power. Remember that Jesus had walked on water (Mt. 14:24-36). And on one occasion He had been asleep onboard a boat at sea when a storm arose, causing the disciples to think that they were going to die. The wind howled, the waves crashed, and the boat creaked as it rolled upon the sea, took on water,

and began to sink. The disciples cried out, "We perish!" Jesus said simply, "Peace! Be still!" (Lk. 8:22-25). The wind and seas immediately obeyed His voice, and a tranquil calm overtook the boat. Through miracles we can see the deity of Christ.

Also through miracles we see that the apostles and prophets were shown to be inspired. In Mark 16:17-18 we read, "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." Please note that as Jesus gave these instructions, it was just prior to His ascension into Heaven. There is no doubt that He said, "These signs **will** follow...." For a person to deny that the miracles occurred after Jesus ascended into Heaven, he or she also must deny Jesus Himself. Let's examine how the miracles were used by Jesus' disciples. First, let's take a close look at the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. This is critically important, so I encourage you to open your Bibles and turn with me to the very last verse of Acts 1, where read, "And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (vs. 26). From this passage we learn who Luke will be discussing in the verses that follow. In Acts 2:1 it says, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." Who is the "they"? It is Matthias and the other eleven apostles, who now composed the twelve apostles. In Acts 2:2-4 we read,

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Notice the "them" and "they" in these verses. What did the apostles do? They "began to speak with other tongues." Without doubt, the apostles were given the ability to speak in tongues. The question is: What exactly does the term "speaking in tongues" mean? Let's allow the Bible to be its own best interpreter. Drop down to verse 11, where we find the term used again. As we conclude the list of people from all over who were assembled on that occasion, we read, "We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." These people marveled that the apostles, rather than speaking in some sort of strange, unknown languages, were speaking in the various languages of people from different parts of the world. Notice verse 6: "And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and was confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language." The words "tongues" and "language" are interchangeable. In verse 8 we read, "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?" Thus, "speaking in tongues" is the same thing as "speaking in languages that already existed." So what was the miracle? By the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles had been given the ability to speak in tongues (languages) that they had never studied. These men would be God's messengers throughout the world, and would need to be able to communicate with people wherever they traveled. This, then, was the miracle. When we compare this with modern-day tongue speakers, we see something completely different. We see something completely unheard of in the pages of the Bible. Those today who claim to have this same ability speak gibberish that no one can understand. But the apostles had been empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in languages that were known to the people to whom they spoke. The miracle made communication of God's Word possible.

We also need to take notice of a man by the name of Stephen. He was one upon the apostles had laid their hands in order to empower him to perform miracles (Acts 6:6). In Acts 6:8 we read, "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Philip, too, is mentioned in Acts 6:5. In Acts 8:6 we read, "And the multitudes

with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." It is clear that the Holy Spirit gave power to the apostles. It also is clear that the apostles had the ability to pass on this power, while those who had received the gift to work miracles in this manner did not have the ability to pass it on. Philip was preaching in Samaria, but it was not until the apostles had traveled there that others in that region would receive the ability to work miracles. Notice in Acts 8:17—"Then they [Peter and John, vs. 14] laid hands on them [those in Samaria], and they received the Holy Spirit." There is no recorded incident where any other person other than the apostles was able to impart to others the ability to work miracles.

There is much more that we could say about the works of the apostles themselves, but for sake of time we will mention just a few. In Acts 9:33-35 Peter healed Aeneas. Acts 9:36-42 tells us how Peter also restored Dorcas (or Tabitha) to life. In Acts 13:6-12, Paul blinded Elymas, and in Acts 14:8-11 he healed a cripple. In Acts 20:9-12 he restored Eutychus to life. And, in Acts 28:3-6, Paul suffered no ill effect after having been bitten by a viper. There are so many more miracles like these that are recorded for us, but we simply do not have time to list them here.

Miracles are acts or events that cannot be proven false. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, there was no dispute. Even though there were some people who desperately wanted to show Jesus to be a fake, they could not do so. In John 11:45 we read, "Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and who had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him." They saw the miracles which proved beyond doubt that Jesus had God's approval. Because of those miracles, they believed in Jesus. But the Pharisees, blinded by their prejudices, could not believe. In John 11:53 we read, "Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death." They knew that they could not prove that Christ's miracles were fakes. Thus, the only option in their minds was to kill Him. I already have mentioned the lame man whom Peter healed as he and John were entering the temple (Acts 3:1-4). But what effect did this have on the people? In Acts 3:10 we read, "Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him." But the miracle had a negative effect on some people. In Acts 4 we see the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees come upon Peter and John. And in verse 3 we see the two apostles being arrested. The next day they were brought before the high priest and others who commanded them to stop teaching about Jesus. But the Jews were unable to overcome the teaching because, as Acts 4:16 informs us, "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 was true; there was no denying the miracle. The fact is, if there had been any way to disprove the miracle, the combined efforts of the religious leaders of that day would have found it. But a true miracle could not be proven false.

Another important fact about miracles is that they were temporary—having been designed to eventually come to an end. In 1 Corinthians 12 through 14 we find Paul speaking at great length about miracles. In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, there is a long list of the different types of miracles. Then, in chapter 13 (the "love chapter") Paul compares love with spiritual gifts—and concludes that the greatest gift is love. Notice what 1 Corinthians 13:8 says: "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." Paul tells us that miracles would come to an end. In 1 Corinthians 13:10 Paul said, "But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." What is Paul saying was "in part"? In 1 Corinthians 13:9 he said, "For we know in part and we prophesy in part." That explanation is easily understood when we stop to realize that, at that time, a complete New

Testament did not exist. Those who had been given the miraculous ability to speak as a prophet knew only part of the whole New Testament, which was not in its complete, written form at that time. Yet Paul said, "When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." We need to understand what Paul meant by the phrase, "that which is perfect." Many today teach that this verse is speaking about Jesus' Second Coming. But that cannot be the case because in the Greek language the word "perfect" is in the neuter gender. Yet whenever Jesus is mentioned in the New Testament, it is always in the masculine gender. The conclusion must be, then, that the phrase "that which is perfect" must refer to the complete New Testament. When the writers of the New Testament laid down their pens for the final time, miracles would come to an end. They would be needed no more.

I would like to encourage you to join us again in the future as we examine the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE USE OF MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE”

1. What, exactly, is a miracle?
2. According to John 20:30-31, what was one of the purposes of miracles during New Testament times?
3. When it came to those who spoke or wrote on God’s behalf, what purpose did miracles serve when performed by such men?
4. In Exodus 7:3 (“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt”), to what do the words “signs” and “wonders” refer?
5. What did Nicodemus say about Christ (Jn. 3:2) regarding the miracles Christ performed?
6. According to Acts 2:22, what proved Christ’s deity?
7. What important miracle did the prophet Elijah perform in 1 Kings 18?
8. What was the purpose of the miracle that Elijah performed in 1 Kings 18?
9. According to 1 Kings 18:38-39, what was the end result of the miracle that Elijah performed?
10. Why, in John 11:15, did Jesus tell His disciples that He was glad Lazarus had died?
11. According to John 11:45, what happened after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead?
12. What significant miracle occurred in Acts 2 in regard to the twelve apostles?
13. What does the Bible mean when it says that someone could “speak in tongues”?
14. The apostles received the ability to perform miracles from the Holy Spirit. How, according to Acts 8:17, did other people receive the power to perform miracles?
15. In Acts 28:3-6, what amazing miracle occurred in regard to the apostle Paul?
16. Because the Pharisees could not disprove Christ’s miracles, what, according to John 11:53, did they decide to do?
17. According to Acts 4:16, when the people saw the works of Peter and John, what could they not deny?
18. In 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul spoke of how miracles would cease, but something else would continue. What was that “something else”?
19. In 1 Corinthians 13:10 Paul referred to “that which is perfect.” Of what was he speaking?
20. Why do we today no longer need miracles?