

# Miracles and the Historical Jesus

Gospels 1.205  
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What do you think is the most memorable miracle Jesus did?

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<i>Nature Miracles</i>	<i>Healings</i>	<i>Raising the Dead</i>
Cana Water/Wine Catch of Fish Calming Storm Loaves/Fish Walking on Sea Coin in Fish Fig Tree	Demonized Peter's MotherInLaw Leper/s Paralytic Withered Hand Woman w/ Bleeding Deaf and Dumb Blind Epileptic Boy Man w/ Dropsy Bartimaeus Centurion's Slave Woman's Daughter	Son of Widow of Nain  Jairus' Daughter  Lazarus

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**For Your Information:**

A definition of a **miracle**: "A miracle is

- (1) an unusual, startling, or extraordinary event that is in principle perceivable by any interested and fair-minded observer,
- (2) an event that finds no reasonable explanation in human abilities or in other known forces that operate in our world of time and space, and
- (3) an event that is a result of a special act of God, doing what no human power can do."

("Miracles and Modern Minds," John P. Meier, *The Catholic World*, March-April 1995, v238, n1424, 52)

Who else in the Bible performed miracles?

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Read Exodus 7-8 and consider the miracles performed by Moses and the magicians of Pharaoh.

- Stick > Snake
- Water > blood
- Calling forth frogs (but not gnats)

What is the difference between what the magicians do and what Moses does?

### Who else in the Bible performed miracles?

How would you categorize the miracles of Elijah (1 Kings 17.13-24: endless meal and oil; reviving son) and Elisha (2 Kings 2.19-24; 4.1-44; 6.1-7: fresh water; bears; oil; revives son; de-poisoning food; feeding 100; floating iron axe head) in comparison to those of Jesus?

### Matthew 12.38-39

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." <sup>39</sup> But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

- Why did the scribes and Pharisees ask for a sign from Jesus?
- How did Jesus respond?  
("Sign of Jonah" - One explanation of what this means is given in Matthew 12.40. A different explanation is given in Luke 11.30.)

### Read John 4.46-53

<sup>46</sup> Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. <sup>47</sup> When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. <sup>48</sup> Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you [p] see signs and wonders you will not believe." <sup>49</sup> The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies." <sup>50</sup> Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. <sup>51</sup> As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. <sup>52</sup> So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him." <sup>53</sup> The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household.

What is the relationship between seeing and believing?

### Read John 20.26-31

<sup>26</sup> A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." <sup>30</sup> Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe [or keep on believing] that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

What does verse 29 say about seeing and believing?

### What is the relationship between faith and miracles?

Read the following passages and note carefully who has faith and to what degree it is exhibited.

- Mark 2.1-12 – the paralytic
- Mark 3.1-6 – man with withered hand
- Mark 6.4-6 – Jesus could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.
- Mark 9.14-29 – 'epileptic' boy

### Read Acts 8.4-13

The story of Simon Magus shows that there were other so-called miracle workers in Jesus' own time.

What is the difference between the "magic" performed by Simon and the "miracles" performed by the Philip?

**Romans 15.17-19**

In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to boast of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the good news of Christ.

**2 Corinthians 12.12**

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works.

What does Paul say about his own miracle working gifts?

**Read 1 Corinthians 12.4-11, 27-29**

How is the ability to perform miracles described in these verses?

**2 Thessalonians 2.9-10**

The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Are all miracles signs of God's activity?

**Read John 6.1-15**

What exactly is the miracle that has occurred in this account?

How do the people respond in verse 14?  
What is their subsequent action in verse 15?

**Now read John 6.25-35**

According to verse 26, what is the enduring effect on the people of the feeding miracle?  
How does Jesus respond?

"What was incapable of happening never happened, and what was capable of happening is not a miracle ...  
Consequently, there are no miracles."

--Cicero

"We say that all portents are contrary to nature; but they are not so. For how is that contrary to nature which happens by the will of God, since the will of so mighty a Creator is certainly the nature of each created thing? A portent, therefore, happens not contrary to nature, but contrary to what we know as nature."

--Augustine (*City of God*, 21.8)

"To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle, every cubic inch of space is a miracle."

--Walt Whitman

"People talk about Bible miracles because there is no miracle in their lives. Cease to gnaw that crust. There is ripe fruit over your head."

--Thoreau

... Consequently, there are no miracles.

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--Augustine

Read the quotations about miracles by Cicero, Augustine, Whitman, and Thoreau. Do you agree or not with them? Why?

To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle...

--Walt Whitman

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--Thoreau

## QUESTIONS

Even if a skeptic should admit that Jesus performed miracles, what does the performance of miracles prove about Jesus? (Keep in mind the evidence we have that others-including people like Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and the apostles-also performed miracles.)

In John 20.30-31, there is a difference in one letter of a word between some of the most ancient and best Greek manuscripts. With the extra letter, verse 31 says, "But these [signs] are written so that you may *come to believe* that Jesus is the Messiah..." Without the letter, it says, "But these [signs] are written so that you may *keep on believing* that Jesus is the Messiah..." What is significant about this difference and the relationship between signs and faith?

Should you be praying for miracles to happen in your life?

What if you should pray, and a miracle does not happen?

What if you do not pray, and a miracle does happen?

How would you respond to someone who says that miracles would happen if only you had more faith?

Should people be praying for God's help in seemingly insignificant matters like winning a game or hoping for nice weather? Are these requests for miracles?

Why are there not more miracles happening today? Or, what miracles are happening that we are not recognizing?

You have probably read reports about people who claim to have seen statues of Jesus or Mary weeping or seen their faces on a wall or in a cloud. Are these miracles? What do they prove?

In the earliest Christian message (1 Cor 15.3-7) as well as in the Apostles' Creed, there is no reference to the miracles of Jesus. Is this intentional? Is it significant?