

The Purpose of Miracles

Old Testament Days

Exodus 4:1-9

When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He told Moses to tell the Israelites and Pharaoh that God had appeared to him and then deliver God's message. (See Exodus 3:16, 18.)

Moses objected, "Suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice . . ." So God granted him two miraculous signs, "That they may believe that the Lord God . . . has appeared to you," and so "that they may believe the message. . ."

The Early Church

Mark 16:14-20

After Jesus was glorified (John 7:38-39; 12:16, 23-33; 13:31-33; 17:1-5), He appeared to His disciples and told them to go preach. He gave them miraculous signs for the same reason Moses had been given that ability:

"The Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs."

Acts 14:3

Paul and Barnabas were "speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands."

Hebrews 2:2-4

When salvation "first began to be spoken by the Lord, and . . . those who heard Him," God was "bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit."

1 Corinthians 14:2-4, 22-26

When Christians in the first century were granted miraculous "manifestations of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:6-11), the same purpose was stated. Speaking in tongues (or simply, "tongues") was "for a sign" to the one doing it, as well as to "unbelievers". Prophecy was for a sign "for those who believe." All the miraculous signs were to "be done for edification" or "the profit of all." (12:7)

Miracles Versus the Written Word

Miracles and signs had always helped confirm God's word to the eyewitnesses listening to God's messengers.

As God's word was written down, the need for miracles and signs faded away. 1 Corinthians 13 teaches that tongues, prophecies and miraculous knowledge would "cease", "fail" and "vanish away." This thought might disturb us until we realize that the benefit of those signs is accomplished in the written word.

John 20:30-31 - Jesus' signs were written down so that the readers "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." People in the first century did not have to witness Jesus' signs personally or even hear the apostles preach. They could read letters from the apostles

1 John 5:13 - The book of 1 John was written so that believers "may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God." The written word not only *brings* us to faith (Romans 10:17), it helps us *maintain* our faith.

Luke 16:29-31 - A miracle was not performed because God's message had already been written down. Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." At the time Jesus told the parable (and the same holds true for us today), this could only happen by people *reading* what Moses and the prophets had written.

Resurrection of someone from the dead would not convince people to obey God any more than the written word could. After all, think how many people saw Jesus and the apostles perform miracles but did not believe!