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Conducted by  
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**“We read of angels working miracles in a pool in New Testament times. Could the same kind of miracles be happening today - e.g. at Lourdes or anywhere else?”**

There are many people who believe that the age of miracles is not passed. It seems that man is quite ready to place his confidence in the natural and material which he sees around him, but when for some reason the natural seems to fail him, he then begins to look for the intervention of the supernatural into his personal affairs. He is forced to do this because there is no other place for him to look to, irrespective of whether he believes that God is the Divine supernatural agency on whom he wants to call, or not.

So far as the Bible is concerned there are two fundamental ideas which should be considered. The word ‘miracle’ is a somewhat unfortunate translation of the Greek word SEMEION which means ‘a sign’; the other word is DUNAMIS which means power. So the Biblical idea of miracle is that we should regard it as ‘a sign’ of the Divine presence; a word of Divine authority backed by a demonstration of Divine power. You will notice that this is so if you examine the scripture which the questioner refers to, i.e. John 5:2-9.

If it is true to say, as it undoubtedly is, that miracles *were* performed in times past, then it must also be true to say that miracles are *possible* at any time in the present or future. The same Divine power is still available, but whether or not the credibility of miracles, or the evidence of performance, can be sustained in modern times is the question to which we must turn our minds.

#### **The Modern View**

A thing which is credible is deserving of, or entitled to, belief, and obviously this credibility will alter, so far as people are concerned, with differing circumstances. For example, someone who had lived all of his life in blistering heat would find it incredible that other people could live in houses made of ice. Conversely, a person who lived, ate, and slept in furs would find it difficult to believe that anyone could survive by just wearing a loincloth. Taking this reasoning a stage further, we can understand that the credibility regarding miracles would only be proved if miracles had ever formed part of human experience.

Has the idea of miracle been carried over into modern society? Do people really expect intervention into human affairs? If we say no, then how do we explain the attendance of many people at seances and meetings of spiritists; the belief in protection offered by the carrying of St. Christopher badges; the mascots carried by thousands of people in all walks of life; the petitions to some deity to intervene in certain circumstances. The paradox is that many who practice such things are themselves professed atheists and materialists. When one sees such examples of widespread superstition, one can only conclude that the idea of supernatural interference in human affairs is deep-rooted in many peoples minds. This in turn

suggests that the belief in miracles has at some time been the experience of the human race. But we need to look for the *evidence* of miracles, and the *value* of such evidence before we can define our own attitude today.

#### The Evidence

Scriptural examples of miracles should never be confused with the more superstitious types of interference beloved of so many people. It seems that the majority of miracles noted in the Biblical narratives are confined to three specific periods of time. The first of these is the period when the Israelites were removed from the bondage of Egypt, and set forth as God's chosen people with the express purpose of guarding His revelation and laws. The second period is that of Elijah and Elisha when the nation seemed to be heading for apostasy, and God had to demonstrate His power to the peoples and nations around the Israelites. The third and final phase is concerned with the Incarnation of the Lord, and the subsequent declaration by the Apostles of salvation in Christ Jesus. The scriptural *evidence* of such miracles is clearly seen when the events of these three periods of time are studied. The *value* of that evidence is seen in the fact that in no way did the working of these miracles portray the glory of the people who performed them, but were rather the glorious and powerful signs of God Himself (even the Lord sought not His own glory, but His that sent Him).

#### The Conclusion

There is irrefutable evidence to the fact that miracles have been part of the human experience. This evidence suggests that such miracles have been most prevalent during crises which have affected human morality, indeed, in the three instances I have mentioned God's concern has been to take people out of bondage and bring them into a safe relationship with Him. It is interesting to note that miracles associated with the confirmation of the Gospel of Christ seem to be no longer necessary. Faith has come in order to take the place of the supernatural confirmatory 'sign', and consequently we read in Jude 3 "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints". So in that sense, we now live by faith and not by sight. There is no longer any need for God to work miracles.

#### The Experiential Problem

The Christian would be the first to admit that a notable miracle has been worked in his life, namely, the gracious in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit in his life. The miracle of grace still goes on. But the Christian also realises that the purpose of this is so that the glory of *God* should be seen in him.

This is not so of the so-called charismatic groups. They believe that God intervenes in their lives and gives them supernatural experiences such as speaking in tongues, gifts of healing, exorcism of evil spirits, etc., and they regard these interventions as confirmatory signs of *their* personal faith and not the expression of the glory of God. They would infer rather deprecatingly that those who did not have these miraculous interventions had still a long way to go before they were pleasing to God. Christians need to beware of this attitude, and should try to expose it for what it is, an attempt to satisfy an ego trip. God has never promised the perpetuity of His intervention in human affairs by the miraculous. When the sick were brought to Jesus, the Bible teaches that He healed *them all*. There is no identifiable evidence, medical or otherwise, of this sort of miraculous power either at famous shrines to which sick people go or are taken, or at any other place that I know of. Oh, I can well imagine the eager expectation and hope of pilgrims as they make their journeys to such places, and perhaps it would be unwise and unloving to undermine the therapeutic value of such belief and hope in the case of some, but surely God would be a respecter of persons if

He indiscriminately bestowed His miraculous gifts on some and withheld them from others who needed them just as urgently.

Furthermore, we Christians need to be quite clear in our minds what we are petitioning God for when we pray. Let us at least be consistent in our thinking. I know of Christians who have prayed for fine weather on the occasion of a Bible School outing. What do such expect? That the Divine hand will reach down and sweep all the clouds away over *their* particular area? Don't misunderstand me; I know that we are exhorted to pray and to ask God for things, but how do we expect God to deliver? Either we believe that He intervenes or that He doesn't. We cannot expect Him to intervene when *we* ask Him to, and then roundly condemn others who say that He has intervened in *their* lives in some specific way. Personally, it presents me with all sorts of problems if I have to believe that God intervenes in human affairs in a miraculous sense today.

Perhaps we ought to re-think our position in the light of what James teaches. It is not a scrap of use petitioning God to miraculously provide clothes for some poor soul when we ourselves have the means to provide them. It is little use petitioning God for the spread of the Gospel when our lingering feet are treading in opposite directions. You know what I am talking about, don't you? Perhaps we are looking to God for intervention with miracles, when we are not exploiting to the full the wondrous miracle which He has wrought in each one of us. If we can do that, then perhaps the world will see and understand the greatest miracle ever - transformed lives outworking His will.