

The Signs of an Apostle (Acts 9:32-43)^a

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Context

1. The early church, established on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2
2. Peter, the early leader, preached on the Day of Pentecost
3. Peter and John performing the “signs of Apostles”
4. Saul/Paul enters the picture as a major persecutor of the early church
5. Paul’s conversion and early, powerful ministry (early part of Acts 9)
6. Emphasis shifting from Paul back to Peter, in preparation for taking the gospel to the third people group/region: 1) Jews/Jerusalem and Judea; 2) Samaritans/Samaria; 3) *Gentiles/the ends of the earth*.
7. Setting
 - A. On the way from Jerusalem, the Holy City and ground-zero of the start of the Church, to Joppa, on the Mediterranean coast
 - I. Jerusalem → Emmaus → Lydda → Joppa
 - II. It is at Joppa, in chapter 10, where Peter will make contact with Gentiles seeking God

Passage (Acts 9:32-43)

[32] Now it came to pass, as Peter went through all parts of the country, that he also came down to the saints who dwelt in Lydda. [33] There he found a certain man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed. [34] And Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus the Christ heals you. Arise and make your bed.” Then he arose immediately. [35] So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord. [36] At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. [37] But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. [38] And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. [39] Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which

Dorcas had made while she was with them. [40] But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. [41] Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. [42] And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. [43] So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.¹

Comparison between Peter and Paul

1. (1) Both healed a lame man, Peter (Acts 3:6-7), Paul (Acts 14:8-10).
2. (2) Both heal through indirect media, Peter via a shadow (Acts 5:15), Paul via handkerchiefs (Acts 19:11-12).
3. (3) Both impart the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, Peter (Acts 8:14-17), Paul (Acts 19:6).
4. (4) Both oppose a sorcerer, Peter (Acts 8:20), Paul (Acts 13:6-12).
5. (5) Both were worshiped, Peter (Acts 10:25), Paul (Acts 14:11-13).
6. (6) Both miraculously released from prison, Peter (Acts 12:7-11), Paul (Acts 16:26-29).
7. (7) Both raised the dead, Peter (Acts 9:36-42), Paul (Acts 20:9-12).
8. (8) Both rendered swift judgment, Peter (Acts 5:4-5, Acts 5:9-10), Paul (Acts 13:11).
9. (9) Both have one complete sermon recorded by Luke, Peter (Acts 2:14-40), Paul (Acts 13:16-41)
10. (10) Both entrusted with gospel to people groups, Peter to Jews (Gal. 2:7-8), Paul to Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal. 2:7-8).
11. What Peter did by apostolic authority so did Paul — this authenticates his apostolic authority (2Cor. 11:5, 2Cor. 11:12; 2Cor. 11:11-12).
12. As Paul would later write, he was "not less than the most eminent of apostles" (2Cor. 11:5; 12:11)

Characteristics of True Miracles

1. True Miracles are: *Miraculous*

A. **Not *opposed* to science**

- I. **What is science: the study and characterization of the laws by which God governs the material realm**
- II. **What is a miracle: an event, where God intervenes to set-aside the limits of the natural laws, to directly intervene in His created order**
 - a. **“Norman Geisler, a leading American Christian apologist, puts it this way: ‘belief in miracles does not destroy the integrity of scientific methodology, only its sovereignty. It says in effect that science does not have sovereign claim to explain all events as natural, but only those that are regular, repeatable, and/or predictable.’”²**

B. **By definition: miracles are *exceedingly rare***

- I. **More than extremely unlikely, true miracles are *impossible* aside from supernatural intervention**
 - a. **Creation**
 - b. **The crossing of the red sea**
 - c. **The crossing of the Jordan**
 - d. **The virgin birth**
 - e. **The resurrection**
 - f. **Raising people from the dead**
- II. **The term “miracle” is frequently used too casually, the term has lost its true sense**
 - a. **HEADLINE: “Miracle man survives crash that left him boxed inside pickup”**
 - b. **HEADLINE: “Coach in school bus crash: ‘We were involved in a miracle’ ”**
- III. **When it comes to “miraculous works”, Christians are among the most gullible of people groups—which discredits the cause of Christ.**
 - a. **Why? “If Christians are so easily duped or routinely**

demonstrate they lack objectivity or discernment, why should anyone take them seriously when they testify that some man, almost 2,000 years ago, rose from the dead?"

2. True Miracles are: *Undeniable*

- A. **Man born lame (Acts 3:2)**
- B. **Aeneas, paralyzed and bed-ridden for 8 years (Acts 9:33)**
- C. **Numerous people witnessed, beyond any doubt, that Tabitha was dead**
 - I. ***[When the] disciples had heard that Peter was [near], they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them (Acts 9:38)***
 - a. **Why?**
 - b. **What were they expecting: Tabitha was already dead, after all!**
 - II. **Peter (and John's) reputation preceded him**

3. True Miracles are: *Verifiable*

- A. **Man born lame, carried and laid in the temple gates for decades**
 - I. **Leaping and praising God**
- B. **Paralyzed man was bed-ridden, not seen outside for 8 years**
 - I. **Arose and picked up his own bed**
- C. **Tabitha - stone cold dead**
 - I. **Presented alive and "it became known throughout all Joppa."**
 - II. **Much like Lazarus, it was undeniable**
 - a. **Jesus at Bethany (John 12:9-11), *Now a great many of the Jews knew that [Jesus] was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.***
 - b. **When the miracle is undeniable, expect opponents of God to get**

rid of the miracle worker or the miraculous evidence

c. Those who continue in unbelief do not do so for lack of evidence

D. True miracles are not afraid of investigation: they welcome it!

4. True Miracles: *Point to God* - rather than the one through whom God is working

A. Peter said to Aeneas, Jesus, the Christ, heals you (Acts 9:34)

B. *So all who dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord* (Acts 9:35).

C. *And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord* (Acts 9:42).

D. In the early church, miracles also served to certify the miracle-worker as having authority from God

I. *Why? in order to certify the message of salvation or doctrinal teaching as being from God*

II. Tabitha was dead

III. There were numerous believers present

IV. *Why didn't a local believer, with the gift of healing raise Tabitha from the dead (1Cor. 12:9,28-30)?*

V. *Why Peter?*

VI. *Because establishing Peter's spiritual authority was critical during this time when the Church was being founded, especially before the NT canon had been received*

a. Peter was exhibiting the "signs of an Apostle," as Paul would later describe them (Acts 5:12; 19:11; 2Cor. 12:2).

VII. Caveats

a. The miraculous must always be evaluated in light of the Bible

b. Evaluating the genuineness of a claimed miracle is not sufficient

i. False miracles are not necessarily false in their effects: the way in

which they manifest

- The sorcerers and magicians of Egypt were able to turn wooden rods into snakes (Ex. [7:11-12](#)), water to blood (Ex. [7:22](#)), and bring frogs up upon the land (Ex. [8:7](#)).
 - ii. Their motivation, purpose and, ultimately, their *origin* which must be evaluated—this requires discernment
 - *If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' -which you have not known- 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul* (Deuteronomy [13:1-3](#)).
 - “Wonders” are found among the works of whom Jesus said He never knew, “Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” (Matthew [7:22](#)).
 - Jesus warned that *false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect* (Matthew [24:24](#))
 - Concerning the Antichrist, Paul warns, *The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders* (2Th. [2:9](#)).
 - Concerning his side-kick, the False Prophet, John relates, *He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men* (Rev. [13:13](#))
 - In Revelation, John sees, *saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty* (Rev. [16:13-14](#)).
 - iii. As John MacArthur observes:
 - “The . . . supernatural is a lure that will always draw crowds of people, whether or not they are authentic believers. People crave miracles and paranormal wonders, but that craving is no true sign of faith. (This is one of the central lessons of John [6.](#))”³

5. True Miracles: may be *Private*

- A. **Prior to raising Tabitha from the dead, *Peter put them all out. Only then he knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.” And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up* (Acts [9:40](#))**

- B. Why did Peter put them out? An examination of similar passages suggests a number of reasons why God may reserve miraculous works for private situations**
- C. Miracles may be private: on account of unbelief or scepticism**
- I. Jesus, in Capernaum - on account of unbelief**
- a. ***Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief (Matthew 13:58).***
 - b. **Calvin, “when the Lord perceives that his power is not accepted by us, he at length withdraws it; and yet we complain that we are deprived of his aid, which our unbelief rejects and drives far from us. . . . certainly unbelievers, as far as lies in their power, bind up the hands of God by their obstinacy; not that God is overcome, as if he were an inferior, but because they do not permit him to display his power.”**
 - c. **Barnes, “We are not to suppose that his power was limited by the belief, or unbelief, of men. But they were so prejudiced, so set against him, that they were not in a condition to judge of evidence, and to be convinced. They would have charged [any miracle] to derangement, or sorcery, or the agency of the devil. . . . It is also true, in spiritual things, that the unbelief of a people prevents the influences of the Holy Spirit from being sent down to bless them. God requires faith. He hears only the prayers of faith. And when there is little true belief, and prayer is cold and formal, there the people sleep in spiritual death, and are unblessed.”**
- II. Miracles are not “spiritual circus tricks” to be performed at the beck and call of unbelief or for the sake of curiosity.**
- a. **The attitude of some unbelievers: “God, *prove to me that you exist!*”**
 - b. **Yet He has already proved his existence by what may be seen in the physical realm (Rom. 1:20-21)!**
 - c. **Psalm 78 records this same attitude among the children of Israel while wandering in the wilderness:**
 - i. ***Yes, they spoke against God: They said, “Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock, So that the waters gushed out, And the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also?***

Can He provide meat for His people?" Therefore the LORD heard this and was furious; So a fire was kindled against Jacob, And anger also came up against Israel, Because they did not believe in God, And did not trust in His salvation (Psalm 78:19-22).

d. The same "prove it to me" attitude was exhibited by the Pharisees, in response to the ministry of Jesus

- i. *Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, [in part] "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed (Mat. 16:1-4)*

D. Miracles may be private: to only be shown to those in intimate relation with God

I. Elisha and the widow who was out of money

- a. *And when you have come in, you shall shut the door behind you and your sons; then pour it into all those vessels, and set aside the full ones (2 Kings 4:4)*

II. Jesus - healing the young daughter of the Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue in Capurnum

- a. *When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him [Peter, James, and John], and entered where the child was lying (Mark 5:39-4).*

E. Miracles may be private: to avoid commotion, where publicity would compromise God's timing and intent

- i. *[Jesus]. . . departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. Then they brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. . . . [Afterward,] He commanded them that they should tell no one; . . . (Mark 7:31-33,36).*

Question for miracle seekers in our day:

- 1. What are you really seeking? God's face, intimacy with God? Or His hand,**

requiring Him to manifest in a way which impresses and meets your expectations?

2. **Are you expecting God to reveal new things while paying too little attention to what He already has revealed: the created World; the Holy Scriptures?**
3. **Even if you experienced a true miracle, would it *really* draw you closer to God?**
 - A. **In response to Lazarus' plea to warn His family, Abraham observed, *If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead* (Luke [16:31](#)).**
 - B. **What does the NT record? *But although [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him* (John [12:37](#)).**
 - C. ***For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness* (1Cor. [1:22-23](#))**

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Endnotes:

1. [NKJV](#), (Acts [9:19-31](#))
2. [Ref-1282](#), p. 106
3. [Ref-0164](#), John MacArthur, *Strange Fire Redux*, 25(2) Fall 2004, 85-93, 86

Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0164** Richard L. Mayhue, ed., *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Sun Valley, CA: Master's Seminary). [www.mastersem.edu].
- Ref-1282** Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels (2nd ed.)* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007). ISBN:[978-0-8308-2807-4](#)^d.

Links Mentioned Above

a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/31_Acts_9_32-43/index.htm.

b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.

c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.

d - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-8308-2807-4>.