

Faith: Miracles and belief

Written by Joshua Winslett

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Is there a direct correlation between miracles and belief? In other words, do miracles performed by Christians guarantee that unbelievers will believe in Jesus Christ? This dynamic was recently posed to me in discussion. Without consideration of the ongoing debate concerning apostolic gifts, let's seek to answer this question.

First, there are many case studies to learn from in the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus Christ was said to perform so many miracles that all the books in all the world could not contain them (John 21:25). Theoretically, if miracles solicited greater authentic belief then most that saw His ministry would have believed in Him. However, this does not seem to be the case. In John 10, as well as many other places, many surrounded Jesus and asked for Him to directly tell them if he was the Christ. Jesus condemns them for not believing the evidence of miracles before them, such as the man healed of blindness in the previous chapter (John 9). With all the evidence before them, they still did not believe. Jesus placed their inability to believe directly at their identity. They were not His sheep and no number of miracles would change their mind (John 10:25-26). On the contrary, the miracles made them angry. Furthermore, Jesus stated that many would not believe even if someone rose from the dead (Luke 16:31). If miracles performed today guarantee more believers, then they accomplish victories that Jesus's miracles and resurrection did not do. Even among those who followed Jesus, many were seeking Him to be fed and not because they saw miracles (John 6:26).

Second, scriptural texts that seem to insinuate that miracles, such as the gift of tongues, will create more believers must be considered in context. For example, 1 Corinthians 14:22 states that this specific gift was for those who did not believe. In context, a tongue was a known language that could be translated (1 Corinthians 14:5). Likewise, this agrees with the first instance of tongues in Acts 2 where every person heard in their own language (Acts 2:6). This was what happened in Acts 19 when those at Ephesus spoke in tongues (Acts 19:6). Ephesus and Corinth were a diverse setting much like what we see in Acts 2. Therefore, the gift of tongues was given so that the gospel could be preached to people who did not understand the native language of the speaker. This allowed for the gospel to go out to the world and it verified that the gospel had been sent to those who were not of Jewish descent. The gift of tongues was for those who did not believe so that they may hear the gospel message in their own language.

In the final analysis, those who do believe have experienced a miracle. God has worked the greatest miracle in believers through the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the grave

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(Ephesians 1:19-20). As Jesus told Thomas, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

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