



THE PURPOSES OF MIRACLES

Why did God empower men in the first century to work miracles? One of the Biblical words for “miracle” (*semeion*) provides a clue. This word connotes an act that is beyond natural explanation or human capability and is therefore a sign of Divine authority.

The Bible indicates that God has employed miraculous powers (Himself or through agents) for at least four purposes:

1. **To Establish and/or Create.** God’s creation of the universe and the laws governing it demonstrate this purpose (Gen. 1). The Mosaical Age began with many and mighty miracles (Exo. 19–20). The Christian Age began with an incomparable display of power (Acts 2). Unless God decides to create or establish something else, this purpose no longer exists.

2. **To Reveal His Will.** He thus empowered the Old Testament prophets. Jesus promised the apostles He would send to them the Holy Spirit, Who would reveal to them “all the truth” (John 16: 13). Paul did not learn his message from men, but through “revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 2:10–13; 11:23; 14:37; Gal. 1:11–12). By this means, by the end of the first century, the revelation was complete as we have it in the New Testament (2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3). Since the revelation is complete, this purpose for miracles no longer exists.

3. **To Confirm His Will AT THE TIME He revealed It.** Moses did not perform miracles at Pharaoh’s court to confirm that Abraham, Jacob, or Joseph were God’s messengers, but that Jehovah sent him (Exo. 4:1–9; 7:1–9). Jesus’ miracles did not confirm Moses as God’s lawgiver, but Himself as God’s Son (John 10:37–38). The Lord empowered the apostles and others in the first century to confirm, by miracles and signs, the words **they** spoke/wrote as the revelation of God (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:3–4). The miraculous **confirmation** in every case was contemporary with the **revelation**. Since the revelation is complete, so is the confirmatory purpose of miracles.

4. **To Edify the Church.** The gift of prophecy specifically served this end (1 Cor. 14:1–5). Paul earlier wrote that this gift (and the other miraculous gifts) would be “done away... when that which is perfect is come” (13:8–10). Inspired New Testament prophets were gradually (i.e., “in part,” v. 10) revealing “all the truth.” When it was all revealed and preserved in writing (the completed New Testament), the written Word thereafter provided all of the edification the church needs (2 Tim. 3:16–17). This purpose of miraculous powers was fulfilled by the end of the first century.

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