

# Miracles and Healing

## A Biblical Evaluation of Contemporary Claims

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## Questions

- What does the Bible say about miracles and miraculous healing?
- What should we think or say when we hear about an alleged miracle?
  - Is that something to be embraced and celebrated?
  - Is that something of which we should be skeptical?
- My loved one is sick. What should I do? Is it okay for me to ask God for a miracle?

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## Outline

- How to form your beliefs
- Miracles and healing as described in Scripture
  - Old Testament
  - New Testament
- The results of investigations of miraculous healing
- Our contemporary situation

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## How to form your beliefs

<b>Perspective</b>	<b>Authority emphasized</b>		<b>D O C T R I N E</b>
Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy	Church tradition		
Mainline Protestant	Man and his thoughts		
Charismatic	Experience		
<b>Evangelical</b>	<b>Scripture</b>		

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# How to form your beliefs

- When Scripture addresses something, Scripture alone is to be the authority in our doctrine and theology.
  - e.g. Is Christ God?
  - e.g. Is preaching important in the local church?
- When Scripture is silent on an issue, our experience and the perspectives of others can legitimately be used to inform our beliefs and practice.
  - e.g. What kind of food do I like the most?
  - e.g. How does the Krebs cycle work?

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# How to form your beliefs

- What do you do when your experience or the perspective of others contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture?
  - If you allow the **perspectives of people** to rule over Scripture, you are theologically mainline Protestant.
  - If you allow your **experience** to rule over Scripture, you are theologically charismatic.
  - If you allow **Scripture** to rule over all else, you are theologically evangelical and recognize the authority of Scripture.

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# Miracles: Crucial distinctions

- There are two broad categories of miracles:

Type of miracle	Examples
Miracles directly from God (not performed by a human agent)	Creation (Gen 1-2) The Flood (Gen 7) The Virgin Birth (Mt 1:20)
Miracles performed by a human agent empowered God	Moses parting the Red Sea (Ex 14) Peter healing a paralytic (Ac 3:1-10) Paul raising a boy from the dead (Ac 20:7-12)

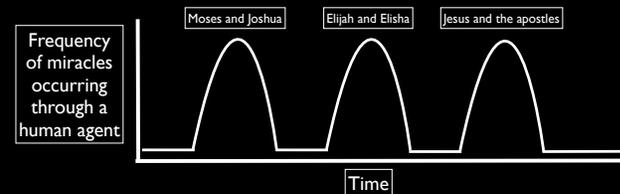
- Evangelicals and charismatics agree that the first category above continues today.
- Disagreement exists though regarding the second category.

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# Miracles: Their timing

- In Scripture, miracles performed by a human agent are overwhelmingly concentrated in three periods:

1. Moses and Joshua (1450 - 1390 BC)
2. Elijah and Elisha (860 - 800 BC)
3. Jesus and the apostles (30 - 60 AD)



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## Miracles: Their purpose

- OT survey:
  - God empowered certain individuals with miraculous abilities to validate and demonstrate their revelatory authority.
- Miracles through Moses:
  - e.g. Ex 3:7, 10-11; 4:1-9 (esp. 4:5)
  - e.g. Ex 14:15-16, 21-22, 28-31 (esp. v. 31b)

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## Miracles: Their purpose

- OT survey:
  - Miracles through Joshua:
    - e.g. Jos 1:1-2; 3:7, 9-10a, 13-17; 4:14, 23 (esp. 3:7, 4:14)
  - Miracles through Elijah:
    - e.g. 1 Ki 17:17-19, 21-24 (esp. v. 24)
  - Miracles through Elisha:
    - e.g. 2 Ki 2:8, 11-15 (esp. v. 15)

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## Miracles: Their purpose

- Jesus performed miracles for several purposes:
  1. To demonstrate Himself as being the Messiah (e.g. Mt 8:16-17)
  2. To prove His authority to forgive sin (e.g. Mt 9:6-7).
  3. To demonstrate His divine authority (e.g. Jn 3:1-2, Ac 2:22)
- Again, miracles were performed to validate and demonstrate one's revelatory authority.

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## Miracles: Their purpose

- The apostles were empowered by God to perform miracles for two purposes:
  1. To validate their apostolic authority and identity (2 Cor 12:12)
  2. To validate their message as being from God (Heb 2:3-4, Rom 15:18-19)
- Yet again, miracles were performed to validate and demonstrate one's revelatory authority.

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## Healing: Jesus' pattern

- Jesus healed people with a wide range of problems:

People healed by Jesus	Example Scripture
Lepers	Mt 8:2-3
Man with a severed ear	Lk 22:50-51
Man with a withered hand	Mt 12:10, 13
The deaf	Mt 11:5
The lame	Mt 15:30
The blind	Mt 15:30
The mute	Mt 15:30
A man without any faith	Jn 5:8-9, 12-13
The dead	Jn 11:14, 43-44
People with every kind of disease	Mt 4:23, 9:35
Everyone	Mt 12:15, Lk 4:40, Lk 6:19

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## Healing: Jesus' pattern

- Jesus healed people through a wide variety of methods:
  - With a word (e.g. Mk 10:51-52)
  - With a touch (e.g. Mt 20:34)
  - Passively by his clothes being touched (e.g. Mt 14:36)
  - Unintentionally (Lk 8:43-45, 47)
  - In abstentia (from a distance; e.g. Mt 8:5-8, 13)

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## Healing: The apostles' pattern

- The apostles similarly healed people with a wide range of problems:
  - The lame (Ac 9:33-34, 14:8, 10)
  - People without faith (Ac 3:2, 4-8)
  - The dead (Ac 9:36-37, 40-41)
  - Everyone (Ac 5:16, 28:9)

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## Healing: The apostles' pattern

- The apostles similarly healed people through a wide variety of methods:
  - With a word (Ac 3:2, 4-8)
  - With a touch (Ac 28:8)
  - Unintentionally (Ac 5:15)
  - In abstentia (Ac 19:11-12)

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# Healing: The NT pattern

- The results when Jesus healed people were:
  - Immediate (Mt 15:28; Lk 13:11, 13)
  - Undeniable (Mk 3:5-6)
- The results when the apostles healed people were also:
  - Immediate (Ac 9:33-34)
  - Undeniable (Ac 4:15-16)

# Healing: Crucial distinctions

- Organic vs. psychogenic (functional) disease:

Type of disease	Description	Examples
<b>Organic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically objectively verifiable, both in presence and resolution</li> <li>• Unmodifiable (at the disease level) through suggestion</li> </ul>	Blindness Deafness Paralysis Withered limb Kidney failure
<b>Psychogenic (functional)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically objectively <b>un</b>verifiable, both in presence and resolution</li> <li>• Highly modifiable with suggestion</li> </ul>	Fatigue Back pain Headache Abdominal pain Most types of pain

# Healing: Crucial distinctions

- Organic vs. psychogenic (functional) disease:
  - "An organic disease is one associated with a demonstrable change in a bodily organ or tissue. A functional disease is one associated with a change in function of a bodily organ or tissue *without any tissue damage*. In dealing with functional diseases such as high blood pressure, addictions, low back pain syndrome, or most headaches, there is no demonstrable tissue damage...By contrast, organic diseases such as broken bones, paralysis from severed nerves, congenital malformations, or coronary artery disease evidence a very clear change in the tissue. Medical science can demonstrate these changes" (Eric Chico, MD).
- Jesus and the apostles reliably healed both organic and psychogenic disease
- Today's faith healers seem to attempt to heal mostly only psychogenic disease

# Healing: Crucial distinctions

- Disease vs. symptoms:

Issue	Description	Examples
<b>Disease</b>	• The underlying pathology that may or may not be expressed in symptoms	Cancer Herniated disk Liver failure Polio Stroke Heart attack
<b>Symptoms</b>	• Functional aberrations apparent to the patient that may or may not reflect underlying disease	Pain Nausea Cough Weakness Anxiety Tinnitus

- Jesus and the apostles reliably healed both diseases and symptoms
- Today's faith healers seem to reliably heal only symptoms

# Healing: Crucial distinctions

- "Search the literature, as I have, and you will find no documented cures by healers of gallstones, heart disease, cancer, or any other serious organic disease. Certainly you'll find patients temporarily relieved of their upset stomachs, their chest pains, their breathing problems; and you will find healers and believers who will interpret this interruption of symptoms as evidence that the disease is cured. But when you track the patient down and find out what happened later, you always find the "cure" to have been purely symptomatic and transient. The underlying disease remains."

"Let me repeat: A charismatic individual - a healer - can sometimes influence a patient and cure symptoms or a functional disease by suggestion, with or without a laying on of hands. Physicians can do the same thing. These cures are not miraculous; they result from corrections made by the patient in the function of his autonomic system.

During the year and a half I spent working on this book, I spent many of my spare hours reading books about "miraculous" healers. I looked through hundreds of volumes trying to find adequately documented examples of cures that could not reasonably be explained except in terms of miraculous powers. I couldn't find one such case" (William Nolen, MD, *Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle*).

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# Healing: Investigations

- William Nolen, MD
  - Investigated healing ministry of famed faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman and others
  - Followed up with numerous people allegedly healed at Kuhlman's healing services using a list provided by Kuhlman
    - All individuals had not been healed or had died
  - Dr. Nolen was unable to identify any healings at all

William Nolen, *Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle*.

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# Healing: Investigations

- William Nolen, MD
  - "Kathryn Kuhlman's lack of medical sophistication (is) critical...The problem is...one of ignorance. Miss Kuhlman doesn't know the difference between psychogenic and organic diseases; she doesn't know anything about hypnotism and the power of suggestion. She doesn't know anything about the autonomic nervous system."<sup>1</sup>
  - One example case of Nolen's investigation:
    - "One woman who was said to have been cured of spinal cancer threw away her brace and ran across the stage at Kuhlman's command; her spine collapsed the next day...and she died four months later."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Nolen, *Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle*.

<sup>2</sup> James Randi, *The Faith Healers*, 228.

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# Healing: Investigations

- André Kole, Christian magician
  - Investigated famed faith healer Benny Hinn and others
    - Hinn to Kole: "Let the miracles speak for themselves. I would more than gladly give you those names or any names you want for you to go check them out thoroughly...I'll supply you with those names right away. I will get them to you. We'll start feeding them to you by next week."
    - Even after frequent and numerous reminders from Kole over two years, Hinn never sent Kole any names.
    - Kole noticed that Hinn's stage strategies are remarkably similar to his own as a magician to create illusions.

André Kole, "Are Faith Healers for Real?" in Richard Mayhue, *The Healing Promise: Is It Always God's Will to Heal?*

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# Healing: Investigations

- André Kole, Christian magician
  - Also investigated miraculous healings at City of Faith Hospital of Oral Roberts University
  - Doctors of the hospital were asked to provide documentation affirming the miraculous healing of organic disease.
  - Even after several years, all physicians at the hospital were unable to provide any such cases

Richard Mayhue, *The Healing Promise: Is It Always God's Will to Heal?*

# Healing: Investigations

- James Randi, magician
  - Investigated the healings of faith healer Peter Popoff
    - Popoff regularly amazed people by knowing personal details of their lives supposedly told to him by God
  - Using a radio receiver, Randi discovered that Popoff's "words of knowledge" were provided to Popoff through a small radio earpiece by his wife who had collected the information prior to the services
  - No genuine "healings" were ever verified

James Randi, *The Faith Healers*.

# Healing: Investigations

	Jesus	Apostles	Today's faith healers
Able to heal organic disease?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal even people who lack faith?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal <i>everyone</i> ?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to raise the dead?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal immediately?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal undeniably?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal unintentionally?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal without any relapses in disease?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal on the spur-of-the-moment?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal out in the open?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal without audio-visual support?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>
Able to heal without an emotionally charged context?	✓	✓	<b>No</b>

# Healing: Various causes

- Some causes of "healing":
  - Natural convalescence
  - Natural disease course
  - Medical treatment
  - Endorphins
  - Placebo effect
  - Stress-induced illness
  - Psychogenic disease
  - Psychological manipulation
  - Misdiagnosis
  - Misunderstanding
  - Miscommunication

## Healing: Its cessation

- The miraculous gifts of miracles and healing eventually ceased



- AD 30 - 55: Ac 2:43, I Cor 12:8-10
  - “Wonders,” “signs,” and the gifts of healing and miracles are realities during this time period

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## Healing: Its cessation

- AD 60: Heb 2:3-4:
  - By this time, “signs,” “wonders,” and “various miracles” are described as having served a past confirmatory function
- AD 61-67: Phil 2:25-27, I Tim 5:23, 2 Tim 4:20
  - Paul apparently is unable to heal Epaphroditus, Timothy, and Trophimus even though he clearly previously had astounding gifts of miracles and healing (e.g. Ac 14:8-10, 19:11-12, 20:9-11, 29:7-9)

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## Healing: Its cessation

- The miraculous gifts ceased because the purpose of the gifts had been fulfilled.
- These miraculous abilities given by God served to authenticate the apostles’ message and authority (Ac 2:43, 2 Cor 12:12, Heb 2:3-4).
- As the apostles’ authority was accepted by the church and their teachings were encoded in Scripture, the purpose of the miraculous gifts was fulfilled.

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## Healing: Its cessation

- John Calvin (1509 - 1564), *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Chapter 19:

“Those miraculous powers and manifest operations...have ceased. They were only for a time. For it was right that the new preaching of the gospel, the new kingdom of Christ, should be signalized and magnified by unusual and unheard-of miracles...The gift of healing disappeared with the other miraculous powers which the Lord was pleased to give for a time that it might render the new preaching of the gospel forever wonderful.”
- Charles Spurgeon (1834 - 1892), “Final Perseverance,” 3/23/1856:

(Speaking of believers in his day): “They had received ‘the powers of the world to come,’ not miraculous gifts, which are denied us in these days, but all those powers with which the Holy Ghost endows a Christian.”

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# Healing: Its cessation

- B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, 25-26.

"Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in revelation; and when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle-working had passed by also."

- Norman Geisler (1932 - ), "The Ministry of the Visible Church," *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 4:

"It is clear that no one alive possesses these kinds of powers to perform on command instantaneous cures of incurable sicknesses with 100% success and with no relapses and resurrecting the dead. The miraculous gift of healing has ceased, the temporary gift used to establish the church's foundation."

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# Healing: Its cessation

- God's power and activity in miracles and healing have not ceased. God was, is, and always will be omnipotent.
- When one is sick, it is fully acceptable to pray for healing, understanding that God may or may not grant the request.
- Recognize the legitimacy and biblicality of seeking medical care (e.g. Mt 9:12, Mk 2:17, Lk 5:31)
- What have ceased are the *gifts of miracles and healing* that confer on an individual the power to heal at will, immediately, completely, and undeniably.

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# Summary

1. The charismatic movement is characterized by an overemphasis on experience as a valid test of truth.
2. It is important to distinguish between miracles that are directly from God and miracles that are performed through a human agent.
3. In Scripture, miracles through a human agent...
  - Are overwhelmingly concentrated during the times when much new revelation was being given by God.
  - Are provided to validate one's revelatory authority and message as being from God.

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# Summary

4. The miracles and healings performed by today's faith healers do not align with the miracles and healings in Scripture and are highly questionable.
  - The witness of Scripture
  - The witness of church history
  - The witness of investigations
5. The gifts of miracles and healing came to an end because the apostolic age was coming to an end and the canon of Scripture was nearing completion.

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