

False Miracles—Part Two

By Dr. Norman Geisler

Kinds of False Miracles. As we noted previously, many unusual events are attributable to God that are not true miracles. God acts through natural processes. Other unusual events are acts of human beings (and/or deceiving spirits, called demons). These are not real miracles either. Satan can fool, but he cannot truly work transcendently over nature—and never intentionally for God's glory.

Magical Tricks. A true miracle is distinguishable from magic. Most modern magicians do not seriously pretend that the illusions they perform are anything more than entertainment that “fools” the public. Those who watch are intended to walk away mystified about how the magician did it, but assured that the magician and his assistants did “do it.” This is not like occult acts unless an illusion is performed for occultic reasons. Magical tricks involve innocent deception, but miracles involve no deception. Magic has a purely natural explanation; miracles do not. A miracle is under God's control, whereas magic is under human control. Like all human actions, magic can be used for good or evil. It is not evil in itself.

Psychosomatic Cures. Mind-body interactions, psychosomatic illnesses and healing do not usually involve pretend or neurotic illnesses and charlatan faith-healers. Mind-over-body cures are not miraculous. Mental cures require faith. Miracles do not. Whether using the placebo effect, touching the television as a “point of contact” with a “healer,” or more directly therapeutic tools like acupuncture and biofeedback mind-training, psychosomatic healings can do good or ill. They use God's marvelous body design to work healing. But they should never be misrepresented as direct interventions or true miracles. They are human phenomena and are common to many religions.

Anomalies of Nature. As noted, miracles must not be confused with a natural anomaly, like a lunar eclipse. The latter is unusual but not unnatural. Miracles are not naturally repeatable. Anomalies are predictable. The flight of a bumble bee was an anomaly for many years, but since it occurred regularly it was predictable even before it was explainable. Anomalies lack the theological, moral, and teleological dimensions.

Special Providence. Some events are caused by God indirectly, not directly. That is, God uses natural laws to accomplish them. These may be quite remarkable and may stimulate faith, but they are not supernatural. George Muller gathered his English orphans around the dining table and gave thanks for food they did not at that moment have to eat. At that time a wagon loaded with bread broke down in front of the orphanage, and all of it was given to Muller. That was an act of wonderful providence, but it was not a miracle.

Satanic Signs. One of the most controversial dimensions of the topic of false miracles is that of Satanic “signs.” The Bible uses the same word for miracle (“sign”) of some unusual manifestations of Satan. Many theologians call these events “miracles.” The question of whether Satan can perform miracles is made difficult because of this common usage of the same word “miracle.” However, if the apologetic value of miracles is to be preserved, there must be some way to distinguish a divine miracle from a Satanic one. Most evangelical biblical scholars agree on some fundamental facts: Satan is a created being (Col. 1:15-16). He is not all-powerful (Rev. 20:10). He cannot create life (Gen. 1:21; Deut. 32:39). He

cannot raise the dead (Gen. 1:21). He is a master deceiver (John 8:44).

Given these facts, there is no reason to grant that Satan can perform truly supernatural events. As a master magician and super-scientist he can deceive almost anyone he wishes (see Matt. 24:24). Indeed, “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19) who is “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). And “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2 Cor. 4:3-4). For “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).

Satan’s powers, though great, are finite and God’s are infinite. It thus seems best to distinguish a true miracle from a Satanic sign in both name and ability. God performs true miracles; Satan does false signs. God does genuine miracles; Satan does counterfeit miracles. This is precisely what the Bible calls them in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 when it speaks of “The coming of the Lawless one will be in accordance with the word of Satan displayed in all kinds of *counterfeit* miracles, signs and wonders.”

Just as there are marks of miracles, there are marks of a work of Satan, which are shown in the accompanying chart.

Divine Miracle	Satanic Sign
Actual supernatural acts	Only a supernormal act
Under Creator’s control	Under creature’s control
Never associated with the occult	Associated with the occult
Connected with the true God	Frequently connected with pantheistic or polytheistic gods
Associated with truth	Associated with error
Associated with good	Associated with evil
Involves truth prophecies	Involves falsehood prophecies
Glorifies the Creator	Glorifies the creature

(to be continued)

(from *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Book House, 1999)

