

False Miracles—Part Three

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Kinds of False Miracles (continued)

Satanic signs are not supernatural. False signs are unusual. They may be supernatural and extraordinary. But they are not miraculous. They can be recognized as false signs if they are not successful, they are not immediate or instantaneous, they are not permanent. As with Moses and the magicians of Egypt or Elijah and the prophets of Baal (Exod. 8-12; 1 Kings 18), Satan's signs lose in a contest with God.

Satanic signs are associated with error. False signs and false teaching go together. "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). There is "a spirit of truth and a spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6). So false teaching will not be confirmed by a true miracle. False signs will be connected with false teachings. A true prophet does not give false prophecies. If the predicted signs do not come to pass, then it was a false sign. False teachings connected with false signs might include that: There are gods other than the one true theistic God (Deut. 6:4; 13:1-3); Worship can use images or idols (Exod. 20:3-4); Jesus is not God (Col. 2:9); Jesus did not come in human flesh (1 John 4:1-2); We should contact departed spirits (Deut. 18:11); We can predict the future (Deut. 18:21-22); Fallible or partly true revelations can come from God (Heb. 6:18); Christ does not have to be at the center of life (Rev. 19:10).

Satanic signs are associated with moral evil. Counterfeit miracles tend to accompany moral rebellion and anger with God (1 Sam. 15:23), sexual immorality (Jude 7), asceticism (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Tim. 4:3), legalism (Col. 2:16-17), pride in alleged visions (Col. 2:18), lying and deception (1 Tim. 4:2; John 8:44), and other works of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:19).

Satanic signs are associated with the occult. Occult practices that can accompany Satanic signs include contacts with spirits (Deut. 18:11); the use of channelers, mediums, or trances (Deut. 18:11); losing control of one's faculties (1 Cor. 14:32); disorderly conduct (1 Cor. 14:40); use of crystals, stones, rods or other means of divination (Deut. 18:11; Exod. 21:21); mind-emptying Eastern meditation, chanting or the use of repetitive phrases (Matt. 6:7); self-deification (Gen. 3:5; 2 Thess. 2:9); astrology (Deut. 4:19; Isa. 47:13-15); idolatry or the use of images in worship (Ex. 20:3-4); experiencing apparitions of dead persons (Deut. 18:11; 1 Cor. 10:18-21; 2 Cor. 11:14).

Satanic signs are limited in power. Satan can imitate God's miracles but not duplicate them. Again, the miracles of Moses and Elijah over the Egyptian magicians and Baal priests demonstrate this superiority. Some have wrongly supposed that Satan can create life and raise the dead. This is clearly contrary to Scripture. Only God is the creator of living creatures (Gen. 1:21; cf. Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:2, 6; Job 1:1). Satan himself is a created being (Col. 1:15-16), and creatures by nature do not create life. Satan's workers admitted that they could not create even lice in Exodus 8:18-19.

Raising the dead was a special sign of an apostle (Matt. 10: 8; 2 Cor. 12:12). If Satan could do it, it would hardly be a distinguishing sign of God's apostle. And if Satan could raise the dead, he could duplicate the resurrection—the crowning proof of Christ's claim to be God (Matt. 12:40; John 2:19-21; 10:18)—and thus subvert the uniqueness of the Christian apologetic. The evidence for the resurrection of Christ would not have been "infallible

proofs” (Acts 1:3). In fact, if Satan could do the same miracles God can do, then there would be no supernatural way to discern truth. For Satan could confirm lying prophets to be telling the truth. Likewise, if Satan could give infallible prophecies, the test that a false prophecy is a sign of a false prophet would be ineffective (Deut. 18:22).

Two texts are sometimes misapplied to support the thesis that Satan can create life or raise the dead. Upon scrutiny, neither is a legitimate example of life-giving power. One is the creating of serpents from rods by the magicians of Egypt. However, the magicians themselves admitted that they could not create life in Exodus 8:18-19. They were trained in illusion and deception. Some modern Eastern snake handlers have been seen to make certain snakes appear to go rigid.

The second instance is a prophecy about what Satan will do in the final confrontation with God (Revelation 13). The second “beast... was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast that it should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the [first] beast to be killed” (Rev. 13:15). This, it claimed is proof that Satan can create life. If the power in fact was given by God, it is conceivable that the power to enliven will be granted to the beast. More likely this is speaking metaphorically, as when Jesus told Pilate, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11). Note also that it is not a human being who has died and is given life here. Rather, it is an “image” (we are not told what sort) of the beast that is given breath. Further, it is not given life but simply “breath.” This could refer to the image being animated or made life-like. There are plenty of scenarios in which this prophetic vision would be fulfilled without Satan giving life to anything.

False Claims to Resurrection. Non-Christian religions and some fringe Christian groups have claimed great miracles, including the ability to raise the dead. No instance of an actual resurrection has been substantiated with anything like the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. Most are patently false.

Some are simply fraudulent tricks. Such is the case of the African witch doctor who claimed to have killed a man to appease the gods and then restored him to life. Illusionist Andre Kole, who has exposed many occult charades, discovered that the witch doctor had dug a tunnel by which the man he faked killing had escaped, and later returned (see Geisler, 118).

Some alleged resurrections are mystically induced “comas.” Some Indian gurus are able to slow down their body processes by altering their state of consciousness. This enables them to spend hours in a grave with little oxygen. At least one modern escape artist was able to escape from a coffin buried under nine feet of dirt in an hour and a half. He made no claim to resurrection. He simply learned to conserve the oxygen from his large coffin while digging through loose soil to the surface.

Some cases are simply medical resuscitations. Medical science performs resuscitation regularly on people who are clinically but not actually dead. An actual resurrection occurs when someone was physically dead. By contrast, Jesus raised Lazarus after he had been buried for four days and his body was decomposing (John 11:39).

Some alleged resurrections are merely cases where individuals fainted or went into a coma. Evangelist and faith-healer Oral Roberts claimed to have resurrected people from the dead. When pressed for names and addresses, he declined. He finally mentioned one girl who had passed out in his service. When asked how he knew she was dead, he said

her body felt cold and that both he and the girl's mother believed she was dead.

Resurrections were reported in Indonesian revivals (see Geisler, 71-72). When George Peters researched the matter first-hand, he found no evidence of real physical resurrections. He discovered, rather, that the word for "death" in the language can also refer to states of unconsciousness, such as fainting and comas (Peters, 88).

Claims of resurrections are still made, but no case has been made for a real physical resurrection from the dead. Anyone who truly possessed this power would be thronged by crowds. Jesus had to pledge people to silence about his miracles (Matt. 8:4; 17:9). He was so besieged by miracle-seeking crowds that he often did not have time to eat (Mark 6:31; John 6:24). But no one since the time of the apostles is known to have possessed these kinds of powers.

God could raise the dead. He will raise all the dead one day (John 5:28-30; Rev. 20:4-5). Until then it is not something he is likely to do.

Conclusion

True miracles are truly supernatural; false miracles are, at best, only supernormal. Satanic signs are earmarked by association with evil and falsehood. Supernatural acts are distinguished by good and truth. Nor does Satan have the power to perform a truly supernatural act. His are always deceptions and usually obvious counterfeits to anyone who knows the signs. He is the master magician and a super scientist. But only God can create life and raise the dead. Only God can infallibly predict the future. Only God can instantaneously cure the "incurable." Satan's power is finite and evil. God's power is infinite and good, and his supernatural acts give evidence.

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

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