

Miracles, Cessation of Sign Gifts. Those who accept biblical miracles debate among one another as to whether the special gift of miracles used to confirm a revelation from God (see [MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF](#)) has ceased since the times of the apostles. The issue has significance for apologetics. First, existence of apostolic, sign gift-type miracles today raises the issue of whether the New Testament miracles uniquely confirmed the truth claims of Christ and the apostles, as recorded in Scripture. Second, if miracles that confirm divine truth claims exist today, are truth claims they accompany to be accepted on a par with those of Scripture? Has divine revelation ceased?

The select individuals known as apostles were given certain, unmistakable signs of their office ([2 Cor. 12:12](#)). These sign gifts included the ability to raise the dead on command ([Matt. 10:8](#); [Acts 20:9–10](#)); heal diseases immediately that were naturally incurable ([Matt. 10:8](#); [John 9:1–7](#)), instantly exorcise evil spirits ([Matt. 10:8](#); [Acts 16:16–18](#)), speak messages in known languages they had never personally studied ([Acts 2:1–8](#), cf. [10:44–46](#)), and pass on supernatural gifts to others to assist them in the apostolic mission ([Acts 6:6](#), cf. [8:5–6](#); [2 Tim. 1:6](#)). On one occasion ([Acts 5:1–11](#)), apostles passed a supernatural sentence of death on two people who had “lied to the Holy Spirit.”

Defense of Ongoing Miracles. Proponents of the proposition that miraculous gifts do exist in the church today defend their claims on several arguments:

God performed miracles in redemptive history. They are recorded from Genesis through Revelation (see [MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE](#)). There seems to be no reason to believe they would cease arbitrarily with the apostles.

God has not changed ([Mal. 3:6](#)). Jesus is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” ([Heb. 13:8](#)). If the miracle-working God has not changed, then why would miracles cease?

Jesus spoke of continuing miracles. He said, “Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” ([John 14:12](#)). In his commission as recorded in Mark, Jesus said that miracles would accompany the gospel as it went out ([16:17–18](#)).

Miracles manifest God’s greatness ([Exod. 7:17](#)) and glory ([John 11:40](#)), to deliver God’s children in need ([Exod. 14:21](#); [Deut. 4:34](#); [Acts 12:1–19](#)), and to communicate God’s messages to his people ([Exod. 4:8](#); [Heb. 2:3–4](#)). These needs continue today.

There are examples of miraculous manifestations as performed through the apostles, including the gifts of tongues, special healing, and even being raised from the dead (see Wimber, *Power Evangelism*, 44).

The Position that Miracles Ceased. Both positive and negative arguments are offered for the position that the special gift of miracles ended with the time of the apostles.

Proving Present Miracles from the Past. Logically there is no connection between past and present miraculous occurrences. Even during thousands of years of Bible history miracles were clustered in three very limited periods: (1) The Mosaic period: from the exodus through the taking of the promised land (with a few occurrences in the period of the judges); (2) The prophetic period: from the late kingdom of Israel

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and Judah during the ministries of Elijah, Elisha, and to a lesser extent Isaiah; (3) The apostolic period: from the first-century ministries of Christ and the apostles. Occurrences of miracles were neither continuous nor without purpose. Theologically the three great periods of miracles have certain things in common: Moses needed miracles to deliver Israel and sustain the great number of people in the wilderness ([Exod. 4:8](#)). Elijah and Elisha performed miracles to deliver Israel from idolatry (see [1 Kings 18](#)). Jesus and the apostles showed miracles to confirm establishment of the new covenant and its deliverance from sin ([Heb. 2:3–4](#)). That miracles occurred at special times for special purposes is no argument that they will exist when these conditions no longer prevail.

Changeless Attributes; Changing Acts. God never changes, but his program on earth does. There are different stages of his redemptive plan, and what is true in one stage is untrue in another. We no longer are required not to eat some forbidden fruit ([Gen. 2:16–17](#)). We need not offer a lamb as sacrifice for sins ([Exodus 12](#)). We no longer are led by the twelve apostles and Paul; rather we have God's final revelation in Scripture. Note that [2 Corinthians 12:12](#) calls miracles "the signs of an apostle."

Promises to Apostles. Jesus did promise that miracles would continue after he left, but he did not say they would endure until his return. It was specifically to the apostles that he made the statement of [John 14:12](#). The antecedent of *you* in that promise is the eleven who were with him. His promise to give the Holy Spirit's baptism, with which came the gift of tongues, was only given to the apostles ([Acts 1:1–2](#)). Only the apostles received the fulfillment of this promise at Pentecost ([Acts 1:26](#); cf. [2:1](#), [7](#), [14](#)). Nonapostolic instances of tongues witness the salvation of the first Samaritans and Gentiles and those on whom the apostles laid hands (cf. [Acts 8:17–18](#); [2 Tim. 1:6](#)) or in the presence of an apostle's proclamation ([Acts 10:44](#); cf. [11:15](#)). The reference to special "signs of an apostle" ([2 Cor. 12:12](#)) make no sense if these gifts were possessed by anyone other than the apostles or those on whom Christ and the apostles conferred the gift.

Desire Does Not Prove Fulfillment. There is a desire for ongoing miracles, but not all felt needs are real needs. Job received no miracle cure. Nor did Epaphras. Nor did the apostle Paul, who earnestly desired to be healed ([2 Corinthians 12](#)). The moving testimony of Joni Eareckson Tada includes her search for a miraculous recovery before she came to terms with the ways God had decided to use her as a quadriplegic.

When compared with the periods that prompted miracles in Bible times, there is no actual need for sign miracles today. Miracles confirmed new revelation ([Exod. 4:6](#); [John 3:2](#); [Acts 2:22](#)). But the Bible is so much more than the New Testament saints possessed, and it is complete and sufficient for faith and practice. Pentecost does not need to be repeated, any more than Calvary and the empty tomb.

Though miracles can manifest God's greatness, glory, and deliverance, he accomplishes these things in other ways. The heavens declare his glory and greatness ([Psalm 19](#); [Isaiah 40](#)). Spiritual deliverance is accomplished in the power of the gospel ([Rom. 1:16](#)). God works through general and special providence without suspending natural laws (see [MIRACLES, MAGIC AND](#)).

Even when there is an apparent need for divine intervention, there are things for which God never performs a miracle today. He does not delay the appointed time of death ([Rom. 5:12](#); [Heb. 9:27](#)). This does not mean God never will supernaturally intervene to solve the problem of death. A time has been appointed for it at the resurrection ([1 Corinthians 15](#)). Meanwhile we await bodily redemption ([Rom. 8:23](#))—the miracle of the resurrection.

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The Problem of Sign Gifts. The claim that apostolic sign gifts still exist fails to distinguish between the *fact* of miracles and the *gift* of miracles:

Gift of Miracles	Fact of Miracles
Limited to Bible times	Occurs any time
Temporary	Permanent
Done through humans	Done without humans
Confirms new revelation	Does not confirm revelation
Apologetic value	No apologetic value

The view that sign miracles ceased with the apostles does not demand that God has performed no miracles since the first century. It argues that the special *gift* of doing miraculous feats possessed by the apostles ceased once the divine origin of their message was confirmed. In [Hebrews 2:3–4](#), the writer of Hebrews referred to these special sign gifts of an apostle as already past in about 69 when he spoke of the message “first announced by the Lord.” “God also testified [in the past] to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” Jude, writing later (after 70), speaks of the faith that was “once for all entrusted to the saints” (vs. [3](#)). Jude exhorts his hearers to “remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold” (vs. [17](#)). Here also the miraculously confirmed apostolic message was spoken of as past by A.D. 70. In spite of the profusion of apostolic miracles (cf. [Acts 28:1–10](#)) up to the end of Acts, about 60–61, there is no record of apostolic miracles in Paul’s Epistles after this time.

This argument from the sudden absence of miracles after their earlier abundance is not to be confused with a fallacious “argument from silence.” The Bible is not silent on the nature, purpose, and function of these special apostolic miracles (see, for example, [2 Cor. 12:12](#); [Heb. 2:3–4](#)). This function of confirming apostolic revelation fits with their cessation, since they were not needed after the revelation was confirmed.

It is to be noted that Paul apparently could not heal some of his own trusted helpers ([Phil. 2:26](#); [2 Tim. 4:20](#)), asking for prayer or recommending that they take medicine ([1 Tim. 5:23](#)). Even while Paul was doing miracles he was unable to heal his own physical infirmity, [Gal. 4:13](#). In fact, there is never a sign in Scripture of anyone performing a miracle for their own benefit. That illness may have resulted from his being blinded

by God or an infliction sent to humble him. Either way, Paul regarded it as increasing his value as a servant through his weakness. Miracles were to be exercised according to God's will.

Special signs given to the apostles established their authority as representatives of Christ in founding the church. Jesus promised special "power" to them as his witnesses ([Acts 1:8](#)). In [2 Corinthians 12:12](#), Paul offered his miracles as confirmations of his authority. [Hebrews 2:3–4](#) speaks of the special apostolic miracles as confirming their witnesses to Christ. It was the pattern of God from Moses on to give such special confirmation for his key servants ([Exodus 4](#); [1 Kings 18](#); [John 3:2](#); [Acts 2:22](#)).

The cessation view concludes, based on both Scripture and history, that extraordinary sign gifts, such as the apostles exercised, have not been possessed by any since their time. While special *gift* miracles have ceased, the *fact* of miracles has not necessarily vanished. There is no evidence, however, of groups or persons who possess special gifts. Given the media penchant for sensationalism, if anyone had such powers it would be a widely publicized fact. Apostolic miracles had at least three characteristics missing in the acts performed by any modern miracle worker.

The Characteristics of New Testament Miracles. First, New Testament miracles were *instantaneous*. When Jesus or the apostles performed a miracle the results were always immediate. The man with a lifelong infirmity was told to " 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.' At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked" ([John 5:8–9](#)). Peter took the hand of the beggar, and "instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong" ([Acts 3:7](#)). Even the two-stage miracle of [Mark 8:22–25](#) took moments, and each stage had immediately intended results. There are no gradual healing over days or weeks. They were all immediate.

Second, a New Testament miracle *never failed*. A miracle is a special act of God, and God cannot fail. Further, there is no record that anyone who received one relapsed into the condition again. If there had been relapses, enemies of the gospel message would have quickly used them to discredit Christ or the apostles.

Of course those who were raised from the dead died again. Jesus alone received a permanent, immortal resurrection body ([1 Cor. 15:20](#)). Lazarus died, again, when his moment had come. The final and lasting resurrection miracle will be at Christ's second coming ([1 Cor. 15:52–53](#)).

Third, New Testament sign gifts as exercised by Jesus and the apostles were *successful on all kinds of conditions*—even incurable diseases and dead people. They healed people who were born blind ([John 9](#)) and even dead and rotting ([John 11](#)). Further, they healed all kinds of disease, not just the easier kinds ([Matt. 10:8](#)). Sometimes, they healed everyone brought to them in the entire area ([Acts 28:9](#)). It is a verifiable fact that no one today possesses the special powers of Jesus and the apostles to instantaneously cure all sicknesses and even raise the dead on command ([Acts 9](#); [20](#)). These special "signs of an apostle" ([2 Cor. 12:12](#)), along with the ability to give people the Holy Spirit ([Acts 8:18](#)), special gifts ([2 Tim. 1:6](#)), and smite lying Christians with death ([Acts 5](#)), have ceased.

Fourth, unlike the miracles of apostolic times, modern miracles do not confirm new revelation, nor do they establish the credentials of God's messengers. The person's fidelity in obeying and proclaiming Scripture now establishes the message. Attempts to stress the miraculous or to claim supernatural gifts has now become a *disqualifying*, rather than a *qualifying*, mark. This is especially true among those who

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claim to foretell the future. For those who make such claims, the biblical standard for accuracy is absolutely no false predictions ([Deut. 18:22](#)). Since new revelation ceased with the apostles, prophetic and other miraculous claims should be seriously distrusted.

Jesus the Final Revelation. Jesus was the full and final revelation of God. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” ([Heb. 1:1–2](#)). Jesus informed the apostles that his revelation would be continued by the Holy Spirit, who “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” ([John 14:26](#)). Using the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit fulfills the role once taken by the prophets: “He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” ([John 16:13](#)). It is clear that the apostles were the divinely authorized agents through which the Holy Spirit proclaimed the final revelation of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the apostles claimed this revelatory power ([John 20:31](#); [1 Cor. 2:13](#); [1 Thess. 4:2](#); [2 Thess. 2:2](#); [1 John 2:19](#); [4:6](#)), claiming the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” ([Eph. 2:20](#)). The early church recognized this authority and “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” ([Acts 2:42](#)). The apostles were the eyewitnesses of Christ ([Acts 1:22](#)), even Paul ([1 Cor. 9:1](#); [15:5–9](#)). Since these divinely authorized channels of “all truth” died in the first century, it follows that divine revelation ceased with them. If revelation ceased, there was no longer a need for miracle signs of a new revelation.

Conclusion. Arguments for the continuance of gift miracles miss the mark. While God does not change, his actions differ with different times. The purpose of signs and wonders was to confirm new revelation, but revelation ceased with the apostles. This is substantiated by the fact that no one since their time has actually possessed their unique power to instantaneously heal and even raise the dead. This does not mean God cannot do miracles now. But such miracles are not connected with any truth claims, nor are they a gift possessed by an individual. Whatever truly miraculous event that may occur has no apologetic value.

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