

MIRACLES

By Raymond White

Do miracles convert people? Yes — and no. It depends. (Don't you love that hopelessly evasive answer, "It depends," which means nothing?) But it does, after all, depend — on who is seeing the miracle.

There were many people who saw miracles and rejected God anyway. Pharaoh (*Exodus 10:12-20*). Pharisees (*Matthew 12:22-24*). False disciples (*John 6:26-30, 66*). Jesus was exactly right when he said: (*Luke 16:31*) *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* There are indeed some people (many people actually) who will not be converted no matter what.

So are we to conclude that miracles don't convert people? No. The scriptures don't say that. There are people who did come to Christ because they saw one or more of his miracles and believed. Nathaniel (*John 8:48-49*). Nicodemus (*John 3:2, 19:39*). Thomas (*John 20:27-28*). A healed blind man (*John 9:38*). A sincerely believing crowd (*John 10:41-42*). And of course Paul who encountered the resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus.

Miracles are important. It is a serious mistake to suppose they are not. When Jesus cast out devils and some Pharisees concluded that he was demonic, he said to them —

Matthew 12:24 All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

Jesus was in effect saying: I can forgive you for rejecting what I say, but I can't forgive you for rejecting what the Holy Ghost does; namely, the miracles. If they reject the visible, obvious, conspicuous, miraculous workings of God, then there is nothing left that God can do that might persuade them. It's not that they can't be forgiven, it's that they won't be forgiven.

[1] WHY MIRACLES?

Why did Jesus do miracles?

Luke 7:22 Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.

His point: "Of course I am the expected one. Don't you see the miracles I am doing? Haven't you been paying attention?"

There is no doubt that, from God's perspective, we are to believe Jesus *because* of the miracles, *because* of the open display of divine power. To those who say "miracles don't convert," they are cutting their faith off at the knees. Why would anyone even say such a thing? Anyone can claim to be Christ, and many do — *Matthew 24:5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.* But only one came with real power, the real Christ, and he did not mind demonstrating that power.

John 5:31 *If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. :36 But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.*

He needed a second witness, and he had a second witness. God's witness made it unarguably clear to all who saw and to all who would later believe (that's you and me) that Jesus is the Christ. Why do we believe it? Not because Jesus said so (anyone can say anything), but because God said so — in the miracles.

Matthew 9:6 *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, Arise, take up thy bed, and go into thine house.*

John 10:38 *Ye believe not me, believe the works.*

John 14:11 *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

Believe what I say or believe what I do. I don't care which so long as you believe.

John 14:29 *I have told you before it come to pass that when it come to pass ye might believe.*

John 20:30 *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. :31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

2 Corinthians 12:11 *...in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles... :12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*

Here's a challenging question, and please be honest: If there were no miracles in the Bible, would you believe the Bible's claims, that God is God and Jesus is the Christ?

Here's the honest answer: Of course not! Words are just words, and outrageous claims (such as "Thou art the Christ") are just madness. Unless, of course, God provides proof. And God did provide proof, and that proof is the miracles. The reason we believe God's words is because God did miracles. It's not the words that convince us, it's the miracles.

What exactly is it that we believe? That God operates miraculously in the world. Here's the point: Without miracles, there is nothing *to* believe, unless we're willing to pray to a rock. People do that. But the difference between rocks and the true and living God is that the true and living God does miracles, giving evidence that he is true and living. Without miracles, he might as well be a rock. Words and claims don't cut it. We believe God lives because he has proved it.

Yes, of course different people react to miracles in different ways.

John 11:45 Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. *:46* But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.

But that doesn't mean that miracles don't convert. It just means that miracles convert some and not others.

When Jesus raised Lazarus, some people "believed on him" because they saw the miracle while others rushed off to snitch on him. But to focus on the snitches and conclude that "miracles don't convert" is unfair. We should rather focus on the people who were converted by the miracles. Without them — Peter, Andrew, Thomas, etc. — there would be no church.

[2] FAITH BEFORE MIRACLES?

While we're discussing Lazarus, consider this question: Does faith always precede miracles? In this case, whose faith might we be talking about? Martha's? Did Jesus raise Lazarus because of Martha's faith? No. She didn't believe Jesus would raise her brother, and she had the most faith there.

John 11:39 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone, Martha...saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh.

In other words, "Open the tomb? Are you crazy?"
Well, if not Martha, then Mary perhaps?

John 11:32 Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

Not Mary. She was a basket case. All that was on her mind was the overwhelming grief of losing her brother.

Anyone else? The disciples perhaps? Nope. Thomas said —

John 11:16 ... Let us also go, that we may die with him.

Thomas was sure they were all going to die. No one believed that Jesus would raise Lazarus. It wasn't on anyone's mind. Then why did he do it if no one had faith that he would?

John 11:42 And I knew that thou [God] hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

Jesus raised Lazarus, not in response to other people's faith, but from his own volition. Yes, God responds to faith, but we should allow God to do what he wants, when he wants. Jesus did this miracle so that people would believe. And it worked! People believed.

The idea that God only performs miracles in response to faith is ludicrous. Here is a list of God doing miracles just because we wanted to.

2 Kings 4:16 *And he [Elisha] said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid. :17 And the woman conceived, and bare a son at the season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.*

This woman not only didn't believe Elisha, she called him a liar. But she was blessed anyway because of her kindness to the prophet. This woman's lack of faith had nothing to do with it. Her kindness to Elisha was sufficient to move God.

2 Kings 5:8 *And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him [Naaman the Syrian] come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.*

Naaman really did not believe. And the only reason he did as the prophet asked was because his servant said why not at least try? He was rewarded for obedience, not for faith. Let's face the obvious: that God uses his miracles to prove his own existence and his power. Many Christians want to squirm out of that. Why, I cannot imagine.

John 5:7 *The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but when I am coming, another steppeth down before me. :8 Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. :13 And he that was healed wist not who it was...*

The impotent man did not have faith in Jesus, didn't even know who Jesus was. This was just an idle conversation between two strangers. But Jesus healed him anyway, just because he wanted to, from the kindness of his own heart. Jesus did not say to this man as he did to the Syrophenician woman, "thy faith hath made thee whole."

One could argue, I suppose, that he had faith in the troubled water, and that faith put him there at the place and time, and therefore in contact with Jesus. But that's a stretch and entirely misses the point of "faith precedes the miracle."

My point is this: while we're arguing in behave of faith, let's not argue that point so sternly that we deprive God of his own volition, his ability and willingness to act whenever he is so inclined. He doesn't have to wait for us. He created the world before there was anyone here to believe it could be done.

Acts 3:5 *And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. :6 Then peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*

Another verse that argues against the idea that faith precedes the miracle. This lame man didn't even know who Peter and John were, he certainly did not expect a healing, what he expected was a coin, a contribution of some kind; what he got was a miraculous healing simply because Peter, and God, wanted to do it.

The danger of believe that faith must always come first is that faith can be in the wrong think. It can be in a rock. Pagans have faith, in fact it must be a really strong faith to believe in a rock. Does that make my faith weaker because I insist that it be in the one true God who has proven himself by his miracles? I reject blind faith. Blind faith can cause you to worship a rock. I prefer instead to stand with the poor father of a dead child who said to Jesus.

Mark 9:24 ...Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.

And Jesus did indeed help that man's weak belief, he brought his child back to life. But what about this next verse?

[3] SIGN SEEKING

Matthew 12:39 ...An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign...

That sure seems to mean that if you insist on proof then you are a bad person. But if that is what it means, then how are we to understand this verse?

John 20:25 ...But [Thomas] said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. :27 Then saith [Jesus] to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

Are we to believe that Thomas was "an evil and adulterous generation" because he insisted on seeing for himself? Clearly that was not the case. Why? Because Jesus graciously accommodated his request (actually his demand): "I must see or I will not believe."

So, what's the difference? The evil and adulterous generation made a rhetorical demand. They were saying, "bet ya' can't." They *had* seen his miracles and still refused to believe. They were demanding signs, not to believe, but so they could justify their unbelief. They were simply looking for a trick that Jesus could not do, then say, "Ahah! Can't do that one, can you?"

Thomas's unbelief was altogether different than that. His belief was real, but it was shattered by Jesus' death. And for Jesus to ask him to believe in the resurrection without proof, that was more than Thomas could muster. He wanted proof. And what did Jesus do? Jesus gave him proof. Jesus didn't chide Thomas for his unbelief, no accusation of "evil and adulterous generation." Thomas's faith needed proof, Jesus gave him proof, and Thomas believed.

If miracles don't convert, there is something wrong with the picture of Thomas and Jesus. But there is nothing wrong. Here's the truth: miracles convert. Not all, but some, and some is far different than "miracles don't convert." Thank God for miracles and those who believe them.

[4] DO MIRACLES CONVERT?

But just to lock it in, for die-hards who insist that miracles do not convert, here is a list of people who were converted to the truth because they saw a miracle, believed the miracle, and devoted their lives to God. I'll also include people who saw miracles and wouldn't believe.

Judges 6:36 Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. **:37** And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water. **:39** And Gideon said unto God, Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. **:40** And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Notice that God did not express annoyance or anger toward Gideon for his doubt and need for confirmation. What God seems to be after is not our blind faith but our willingness and longing to believe. God accepts that he needs to seek after us much more than we need to seek after him. And he says as much. What he insists on, however, is a sincere response to his reaching. If we respond to his reaching with rejection, than he will stop reaching.

2 Kings 5:17 And Naaman said...for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.

Naaman was an avowed non-believer. But when he was cured of leprosy, he was an avowed believer. To argue that miracles don't convert is absurd. Naaman, now cured of leprosy is now a follower of the only God who is God.

2 Kings 20:11 And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

Did God move the earth backwards or did he reset time back a bit or did he do something else? Whatever he did to pull this off, God demonstrates an awesome power over the universe and its laws. What's also interesting is his motive, almost trivial, to convince a man that God had extended his life by fifteen years.

Luke 8:38 Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him...

This man, cured of devils, became Jesus' instant disciple.

Luke 16:31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

I'm including this verse because there is a perfect contrary example: namely, Saul of Tarsus. Saul had exactly this experience. He was a none believer and one from the dead came to him and Saul believed. So it cannot be generally true that "neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Luke 17:15 *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God.*

This miracle, the healing of the 10 lepers, makes my point exactly. Yes, 9 of the 10 were ungrateful and didn't "convert," but one of them did. So the oft-touted claim that miracles don't convert is a false claim. True, miracles don't convert everyone, or even most. But miracles do convert *some*, actually many, and that is my point, that is *the* point, the reason that God does them, to find and save those few who see *and believe*.

John 1:48 *Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou was under the fig tree, I saw thee. :49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.*

Was this a big miracle? As miracles go, it was probably a small one. But big or small, it was enough to convince Nathanael. He became a life-long disciple of Jesus. So don't tell me that miracles don't persuade. Nathanael would argue with you.

John 2:23 *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. :24 But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men.*

Yes, they believed because they saw the miracles. That was the point of the miracles.

But, if you are paying attention, you will complain: "Ahah. Most of them didn't continue to believe when things got tough," and you would be right. Most fell away, but not all. Some committed their lives to Jesus and those "some" is what the miracles were all about. To say that miracles do not convert is simply not true and we should stop saying that.

The reason people insist that "miracles don't convert" is because *they can't do them*, plain and simple. And because they can't do them, they feel pressure to head off the hypocritical demand "show me a miracle and I will believe." So they dismiss the importance of miracles with a wave of the hand, "Ah, what's the big deal about miracles anyway? They're not so important. They don't convert anyone."

Miracles *are* important and they *do* convert. They are God's way of revealing himself to the world whether the world believes or not. And for believers to dismiss the miracles as unimportant is as much a sin as non-believers rhetorically demanding a sign. If you can't do miracles, fine. I can't either. But don't dismiss God's finest work as unimportant when they are actually critically important. Truth is, if it weren't for the miracles, there'd be nothing to believe *in*. We believe in God *because* he revealed himself to the world by his conspicuous displays of power. Without that, we might still worship, but we'd worship a rock! Or some smooth-talking charlatan.

Make no mistake about it. The reason, *the* reason, we worship the true and living God and not a rock is because of his conspicuous displays of power, which we call miracles, which the rock, and the charlatan, cannot do. God's power on display as recorded in the scriptures is the arrow that directs our faith towards him and away from the rock.

Miracles are the tiebreaker. To anyone who insists that miracles don't convert, they should try worshipping a rock. You don't need miracles to worship a rock.

John 3:2 *...no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

That's exactly the point! Nicodemus got it.

John 4:48 *Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.*

This is not an accusation but a statement of fact. Jesus is exactly right. It is, in fact, the miracles that we believe, and therefore we believe God. Were it not for the miracles, why would we? Words are just words. Anyone can spout philosophy. Only God can do miracles.

John 4:53 *So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.*

Don't tell me that miracles don't convert. One miracle, a risen dead son, converted this man, and his whole house.

John 6:30 *They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work?*

This has got to be the most frustrating text in the entire Bible. "Convince us. Show us a sign."

What had that just witnessed? Were they not watching? Not paying attention? Of course they were paying attention. That's why they had returned, for free food. These are what Jesus calls sign-seekers. Understand: A sign-seeker is not a person who wants a sign, but a person who will not believe the signs given and so demands another and another, refusing to believe, looking for an excuse to justify their unbelief. "Bet you can't do this, bet you can't do that." Jesus was very free with his miracles. The problem was not that they wanted his miracles (he wanted them to want his miracles), but that they wouldn't arrive at the obvious conclusion, that he was the Son of God.

John 6:26 *Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*

Let's consider the verse carefully because it dispels a false idea. That false idea is this: that we should not base our faith on the miracles. That is absolutely wrong. If our faith is not based on the miracles, then what should it be based on? Words? Jesus just had a debate about that very thing: you can't trust words — that's exactly the point he made in **John 5:31-34**. Therefore I show you miracles, which you can and must trust.

In **:26**, Jesus affirms that to us again. Not only is it not true that we shouldn't trust miracles (a triple negative, sorry, but it's the only way to say it), he says so — he *wants* us to trust the miracles and he complains: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles..." That's his

complaint against them. He wanted them to believe him because he did miracles, but instead, they just wanted the free food.

John 6:36 *But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. :37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

Yes, there are lots of people who have seen miracles and will not believe. But some will. There are a few who see miracles, believe them, and stay. So don't tell me that miracles don't convert. Jesus says they do — some anyway, all that the Father giveth.

John 9:38 *And he [the healed blind man] said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*

This blind man who Jesus healed, not only believed Jesus and followed him but also defend (**John 9:25-30**).

John 10:32 *Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me? :33 The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.*

In other words, they saw the miracles but would stone him anyway because they don't like what he said. So do we conclude that miracles don't convert? Let's check the aftermath. Jesus fled to the desert to be alone. But he wasn't alone for long.

John 10:41 *And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. :42 And many believed on him there.*

These people saw the miracles, saw that Jesus did exactly what John said he would do, troubled themselves to go to him in a very hostile desert, and believed.

So, did miracles convert these people? Yes. The miracles are exactly what converted them.

So, what must we conclude? We conclude that miracles convert some people and miracles don't convert others. We must also conclude that the notion that miracles don't convert is false.

John 11:45 *Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the thing which Jesus did, believed on him. :46 But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.*

Some saw and believed, some saw and didn't believe.

John 12:11 *Because that by reason of him [Lazarus] many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.*

It's undeniable. The raising of Lazarus brought many converts to Jesus.

John 12:37 *But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him:*

Who is the "they"? I think everyone. Not everyone believed.

John 20:28 *And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

Before Thomas saw and touched the risen Lord, he would not believe, he said so. When he saw and touch, he not only believed, but concluded that Jesus was both Lord and God.

John 20:31 *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

To those who still insist that miracles don't convert, John's parting shot is that the point of the miracles is to make us believe and have eternal life. Without the miracles, and especially the resurrection, just what is there *to* believe? What we believe is that God had displayed his power conspicuously through Jesus, and therefore there is God and his Son. The miracles is *why* we believe. If it's just words, then it's just a story. It's the miracles that make it real.

Acts 1:1 *...all that he said and did.*

The apostles preached two things: what Jesus said and what Jesus did. What Jesus said was his salvation message. What Jesus did was his miracles which proved his salvation message.

Acts 1:3 *...many infallible proofs...*

For those who still think the miracles are no big thing, from God's perspective they are a very big thing. The miracles are the proof that Jesus is who he claims to be.

Acts 9:6 *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*

One man stricken blind, one restored vision, and one life long conversion. Don't tell me that miracles don't convert. Saul didn't need to be told twice that he was on the wrong side, he immediately gave his life to Jesus and never wavered.

Now, a different story is told about Simon the sorcerer, **Acts 8:9**. Simon saw Peter's miracles and (although the entire story is not told in the Bible) became an enemy of the church. So, again the definitive answer to the question "do miracles convert?" is: some yes and some no. But that is far different than the thoughtless answer: miracles don't convert when the scriptures are replete with examples to the contrary. When I hear such boneheaded stupidity in church, I have to sequester my impulse to stand and scream, "does anybody bother to read the scriptures?"

Acts 9:40 *But Peter...said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes...:42* *And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.*

How clearer can it be? Peter raised one woman from the dead, and lots of people join the church — unless you believe that over time they all left the church, which would be nonsense.

Acts 13:11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind....:12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

A negative miracle (harms rather than heals), but still a miracle. And the deputy believed.

Acts 14:9 The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, :10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

Certainly faith calls down the healing power of God. I never said it doesn't. I'm saying that God is free to act with or without your faith, but faith does influence him.

[5] THE BASIS OF TRUE FAITH

It is the miracles that are the root of our faith. Admit it. But many will argue, no, the Holy Spirit is the root of our faith. I argue back, no, the Holy Spirit is the conviction of our faith, to actually believe. But to believe in what? Without the miracles there is nothing to believe *in*. You can believe in a rock but what good does that do? Faith without the right object is useless, and worse, it is dangerous. It is the miracles that point our spirit-driven faith to the right object: the true and living God that proves to us that he is who he says he is by miracles.

Let's do a little Q & A before I let you go. I'll ask the questions and I'll provide the answers. Your job is to decide if you agree with my answers or not.

QUESTIONS

What do you believe?
Good. Why do you believe that?
Convinced you of what?
You said that already. Why?
But anybody can say anything.
Lots of people do good works.
How so? Why were his special?
You believe he did miracles?
That's why you believe his words?
And if he hadn't done miracles?
So his miracles converted you?

ANSWERS

That Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God.
I read the scriptures and the spirit convinced me.
That Jesus is...
Because I believed what he said about himself.
But he did good works.
But his works were special.
Because (sigh) his works were miraculous.
Yes. And he rose from the dead.
Yes. Particularly his claims about himself.
Then I don't know that I could believe his words.
Yes, I suppose they did.

That is an honest assessment of Jesus, his life, his claims, and why we believe everything he said. If you agree, then never again say that miracles don't convert. They converted you.