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STUDY GUIDE

SUPERNATURALLY NATURAL



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Q. What's following you?

Mark 16:17-18 says: "these signs will follow those who believe. In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

It does not say might, or could, but will! It does not say you need to be a "mature Christian", especially spiritual, have a specific gifting or anything else, simply be a disciple of Jesus, baptised in His spirit (Acts 1:8 "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you"). 2 Timothy 3:5 warns us that there will come along Christians who "Have [ing] a form of godliness, but deny [ing] the power thereof". So for the Christians of the New Testament, having signs and wonders follow their preaching of the gospel was not just considered normal, but essential! This is because they understood that while everyone who sees signs and wonders will not necessarily decide to follow Jesus, signs and wonders are evidence to unbelievers that they are in contact with "the (true) kingdom of God" not a fake or man-made religion, and have opportunity to respond to Jesus. It is much harder to deny the reality of who Jesus is when you have just seen a miracle performed in His name! The whole bible from Genesis to Revelation, throughout every generation of believers shows God doing signs and wonders to support His people and the message He gave them.

"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with [them] and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."

Mar 16:20

It was Jesus doing signs and wonders that confirmed He was the messiah (Is 35:4-6) and since we are to be like Him, we should expect these signs to follow us as well.

"During His lifetime, Jesus was probably more famous for His miracles (also called signs and wonders) than He was for anything else. A miracle is something that defies natural laws of nature. You may have heard stories of Jesus walking on water, healing the blind, lame and sick, and even raising the dead. Jesus' first miracle, however, was turning water into wine (John 2). How popular would you be if you had that skill today? But at the time, Jesus was at a wedding with His mum, His family and the disciples and the party ran out of wine. Jesus enabled the party to continue by turning six large jars of water, each about 50 litres in volume, into wine. The maitre d' was amazed that some wine had been found and said it was the best wine he had ever tasted. He congratulated the hosts for keeping the best wine until last."

Born 4 BC, page 43



“Jesus spends the next three and a half years travelling from region to region in Israel, teaching the people, healing their sick, casting out demons, doing mighty miracles, challenging the religious people to get it right, all the while caring for anyone who would come with an open heart (Matthew 4:23). Jesus used miracles to get people’s attention and then, as they were listening to what He might have to say, He loved to teach them about the kingdom of God.”

Born 4 BC, page 53

“Jesus trained His followers to find their ministry in the same way. He sent the disciples out two by two and when they reported back, they told Jesus about all the miracles and demon deliverances they had seen, because they were being accountable for using their gifts.”

Born 4 BC, page 54

STUFF TO TALK ABOUT

— HEAD —

YOUNG	Does Mark 16:17 means you should pick up snakes when you see them? Do you speak in tongues?
GROWING	Why do you think some Christians do not see signs and wonders following their service to God?
MATURE	Why do you think that sometimes when you/others pray for signs and wonders nothing seems to happen?

— HEART —

YOUNG	How do you feel when you see a sign or wonder happen?
GROWING	When you pray for someone to experience a sign or wonder (e.g. healing) what should you remember?
MATURE	What should you say to someone who has believed for but not seen a sign or wonder?

— HANDS —

YOUNG	How can you make an opportunity for God to do a sign or wonder in your world this week?
GROWING	What can you do this week to see more signs and wonders follow you?
MATURE	What can you do to enable those Christians around you to see more signs and wonders?

STUFF TO DO

How can you make an opportunity for God to do a sign or wonder in your world this week? What can you do this week to see more signs and wonders follow you? What can you do to enable those Christians around you to see more signs and wonders?

PRAYER POINTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

HEART FOR THE HOUSE - SUN 21ST AUGUST

STUFF TO GET YOU THINKING

A recent Newsweek poll indicates 84% of Americans say they believe God performs miracles; 48% claim to have experienced or witnessed one.

Teachers and bishops from the 100s and 200s AD and beyond – Tertullian, Cyprian, Irenaeus, and many more – talked about miracles of healing, prophecy, and exorcism as everyday occurrences in the church. Tertullian is typical when he says “God everywhere manifests signs of his own power – to his own people for their comfort, to strangers for a testimony unto them” (Tertullian, *A Treatise on the Soul*).

In Christianity there is conferred (upon pure chastity, upon a pure mind, upon pure speech) the gift of healing the sick by rendering poisonous potions harmless, [143] by restoring the deranged to health, and thus purifying them from ignominious pains, by commanding peace for the hostile, rest for the violent, and gentleness for the unruly, by forcing – under stress of threats and invective – a confession from unclean and roving spirits who have come to dwell within mankind, by roughly ordering them out, and stretching them out with struggles, howls, and groans, as their sufferings on the rack, by lashing them with scourges, and burning them with fire. This is what goes on, though no one sees it; the punishments are hidden, but the penalty is open. Thus what we have already begun to be, that is, the Spirit we have received, comes into its kingdom. (Harnack, 142-3)

(1) God speaks to the missionaries in visions, dreams, and ecstasy, revealing to them affairs of moment and also trifles, controlling their plans, pointing out



the roads on which they are to travel, the cities where they are to stay, and the persons whom they are to visit. Visions occur especially after a martyrdom, the dead martyr appearing to his friends during the weeks that immediately follow his death, as in the case of Potamiaena (Eus., H.E., vi. 5), or of Cyprian, or of many others.

It was by means of dreams that Arnobius (Jerome, Chron., p. 326) and others were converted. Even in the middle of the third century, the two great bishops Dionysius and Cyprian' were both visionaries. . . .

- (2) At the missionary addresses of the apostles or evangelist, or at the services of the churches which they founded, sudden movements of rapture are experienced, many of them being simultaneous seizures; these are either full of terror and dismay, convulsing the whole spiritual life, or exultant outbursts of a joy that sees heaven opened to its eyes. The simple question, "What must I do to be saved?" also bursts upon the mind with an elemental force.
- (3) Some are inspired who have power to clothe their experience in words-prophets to explain the past, to interpret and to fathom the present, and to foretell the future. Their prophecies relate to the general course of history, but also to the fortunes of individuals, to what individuals are to do or leave undone.
- (4) Brethren are inspired with the impulse to improvise prayers and hymns and psalms.
- (5) Others are so filled with the Spirit that they lose consciousness and break out in stammering speech and cries, or in unintelligible utterances - which can be interpreted, however, by those who have the gift.
- (6) Into the hands of others, again, the Spirit slips a pen, either in an ecstasy or in exalted moments of spiritual tension; they not merely speak but write as they are bidden.
- (7) Sick persons are brought and healed by the missionaries, or by brethren who have been but recently awakened; wild paroxysms of terror before God's presence are also soothed, and in the name of Jesus demons are cast out.
- (8) The Spirit impels men to an immense variety of extraordinary actions - to symbolic actions which are meant to reveal some mystery or to give some directions for life, as well as to deeds of heroism.
- (9) Some perceive the presence of the Spirit with every sense; they see its brilliant light, they hear its voice, they smell the fragrance of immortality and taste its sweetness. Nay more; they see celestial persons with their own eyes, see them and also hear them; they peer into what is hidden or distant or to come; they are even rapt into the world to come, into heaven itself, where they listen to "words that cannot be uttered." 19th church historian Adolf Harnack



Burgess's timeline

In the twenty-first century, Pentecostal scholar Stanley M. Burgess updated and deepened Harnack's testimony on this matter. For his *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Zondervan, 2002), Burgess created an absorbing 8-page timeline summarizing his three-volume study, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions; Eastern Christian Traditions; and Medieval Roman Catholic and Reformation Traditions*. Like Harnack's list, Burgess's timeline shows that the early centuries are full of charismatic phenomena. Here are just a few high points noted by Burgess, supporting his claim that the Holy Spirit has empowered ordinary Christians through the centuries – with jaw-dropping results:

1st century

Writers of the *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas* [two inspirational books used widely in the early church] witness so much charismatic activity they find it necessary to distinguish between true and false prophets. At about the same time, the writer of *Pseudo-Barnabas* suggests prophetic ministry is normative in the church.

2nd century

[Christian apologist] Justin Martyr argues that God has withdrawn the Spirit of prophecy and miracles from the Jews and has transferred it to the church as proof of her continued divine favor.

Irenaeus of Lyon describes the gifts of prophecy, discernment of spirits, and exorcism in his Gallic church, and even mentions that individuals have been raised from the dead. He warns against certain false Gnostics who fabricate spiritual gifts to win favor with the nave.

3rd century

Origen of Alexandria says healings, exorcisms, and validating signs and wonders continue to be experienced in the church. Just as miracles and wonders added to the credibility of 1st-century apostles, so they continue to draw unbelievers into the Christian fold."

4th century

Augustine [of Hippo], in *The City of God*, reports contemporary divine healings and other miracles. These he links directly to the conversion of pagans.

Harnack's list and Burgess's timeline suggest something important: The church has rarely lacked for witnesses, from the widest variety of camps, who have proclaimed that the Holy Spirit is alive, well, and gifting believers in his church.

Though diverse in many ways, these witnesses of past centuries join in claiming for the church the same "promise of the Father" Jesus held out to his Apostles: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5).

<http://gratefultothedead.wordpress.com/2010/03/27/signs-and-wonders-the-charismatic-power-of-early-christianity/>



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