

William Tyndale on the Miracles of Satan

By R. Magnusson Davis

Lying Miracles

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Miracles Confirm Us In Our Faith, Be It False or True



Lying Miracles

Anyone who has spent time in a Charismatic Church knows that miracles—that is, supernatural occurrences of different sorts—are really happening there. Not all the stories about signs and wonders and ‘manifest presence’ are false.

In the 16th century, a time of great superstition and apostasy, the Church also had its share of false prophets and prophetesses who claimed to have received divine revelations and visions. William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536) was one of many men God raised up in those dark times to expose spiritual deception.

In 1528 Tyndale published *The Obedience of a Christian Man*. This book addressed many issues of the day, most of which remain of concern although under different names and disguises. The book was influential among believers, by whom it was greatly appreciated. It caused a stir among many conservatives, who opposed it. But it also had influence when it reached the hands of Anne Boleyn and, through her, England’s King Henry VIII. Though the king did not really understand the book, it factored in his break with Rome.

In *The Obedience*, Tyndale briefly discussed the miracles of Satan, why God permits them, and what they may show us about ourselves. He also added some commentaries in the margin of his translation of 2 Thessalonians 2. I will review his teaching here, using the Penguin edition of *the Obedience* which contains helpful notes by Professor David Daniell.¹ When I quote from it, I will modernize minimally for clarity’s sake (e.g. *thou* to *you*, syntax, obsolete words). Scripture quotations in this short paper are from the *Matthew Bible*,² and are also minimally modernized.

God's Purposes in Lying Miracles

When his contemporaries claimed miracles to show a divine anointing and to prove their doctrine, William Tyndale, in *The Obedience*, cautioned that it is to God’s word and to God’s promises alone that we must look, not to such signs and wonders:

And when they cry “miracles, miracles”, remember that God has made an everlasting testament with us in Christ’s blood, against which we may receive no miracles—no, not even the preaching of Paul himself, according to his own teaching to the Galatians, nor yet the preaching of the angels of heaven. Therefore the miracles claimed either are not genuine, but feigned (as in the case of the miracle where Saint Peter hallowed Westminster³), or if there are miracles that confirm doctrine contrary to God’s word, then they are done by the devil (as with the maids of Ipswich and of Kent⁴).

Miracles done by the devil are to test us, whether we will cleave firmly to God’s word. And they are also to deceive those who have no love for the truth of God’s word and no desire to walk in his laws.⁵

In the above passage, Tyndale summarized God’s purposes in permitting lying miracles. First, He allows them to prove our faithfulness to His word. We are to be guided by nothing but the word of God. No signs and wonders should draw us aside. Second, Tyndale says miracles done by the devil have the very purpose of deceiving those who do not love truth; this he takes from 2 Thessalonians 2:

⁸And then will that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the Spirit of his mouth and will destroy with the appearance of his coming—⁹even him whose coming is by the working of Satan, with all lying power, signs and wonders,¹⁰and in all deceivableness of unrighteousness among those who perish because they did not receive the love of truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹And therefore God will send them strong delusion, to believe lies—¹²that all who did not believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness, might be damned.

I pause to make a note on the word ‘damned’. The verb *to damn* has lost meaning over the years. We now understand it as meaning only to condemn to eternal retribution. It used to also mean to be found guilty, or adjudged to be bad.

In any case, Tyndale’s marginal commentaries on these verses in 2 Thessalonians 2, as contained in the *Matthew Bible*, were:

Tyndale: “Lying miracles testify to a false faith.”

I understand this to mean that when the unrighteous who follow false teachings see or experience a miracle, that miracle is evidence to them—i.e. a testimony—which proves their imaginations to be true. They receive the miracle as confirmation of their faith. Indeed, it does confirm their faith. But because their faith is in lies, the miracle is a “lying miracle”.

Tyndale: “Where there is no love for truth, God lets false prophets slip in upon the people to deceive them.”

People who are stubbornly persistent and content to rest in deception reveal themselves to be under the judgement of God because they do not love truth; He therefore lets false prophets “slip in” to deceive them. By this they are proved; that is, their unfaithfulness and unbelief are proved. Understanding this can guide us if we are tempted to strive with deceived individuals. If God is not with them, there is nothing we can do except pray. I refer not to informing them, but coming

into strife with them. (And see 2Ti 3:13: "...evil men and deceivers will grow worse and worse, while they deceive and are deceived themselves".)

According to the *Longer Oxford Dictionary* (online edition, November 2012), the "deceivableness" of unrighteousness (2Th 2:10) refers to the deceptiveness of unrighteousness; that is, the capacity that lies and fabrications and things that are unrighteous have to tempt and deceive: to tickle our ears, as it were. Unrighteous people take pleasure in and prefer that which is false over that which is true; and indeed, the truth is often not pleasant to receive. Nonetheless, wisdom is justified in her children; but God sends delusion to those who refuse to accept it, and thus it is that they "*might be damned*" (2:12). It appears that the Day of Judgment is in view here. People's disregard for truth and the pleasure they took in unrighteousness will be evidence against them on that day, showing their condemnation to be just.

All of this is difficult to say and to hear. No one wants to call others unrighteous, or lovers of untruth, or contemplate such punishments. But one should not turn away from a teaching because it is hard.

Moses warned the Israelites that God will test us by sending false prophets:

If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and that sign or wonder of which he spoke comes to pass, and then he says, "Let us go after other gods which you have not known, and let us serve them": do not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God tests you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your hearts and with all your souls. For you must walk after the Lord your God and fear him, and keep his commandments, and listen to his voice, and serve him, and cleave unto him. (De 13:1-4).

A sincere love for God fears Him, keeps His commands, listens to His voice in His word, and will not follow another voice (Joh 10:5).

The Miracles of God Contrasted With the Miracles of Satan

In *the Obedience*, Tyndale further teaches on miracles as follows:

The Miracles of God Move Us to Faith in His Word:

Antichrist will not only come with lying ceremonies and disguised with falsehood, but also with lying miracles and wonders, says Paul at 2 Thessalonians 2. All the true miracles that come from God are to move us to hear God's word, and to establish our faith in God's word, and to confirm the truth of God's promises, so that we might believe them without doubting.

For God's word, through faith, brings the Spirit into our hearts, and also life, as Christ says (Joh 6): the words I speak are spirit, and they are life. The word of God also purges us and cleanses us, as Christ says (Joh 15): you are clean by the means of the word. Paul says (1Ti 2): there is one God, one mediator (which is to say, advocate, intercessor, or maker of atonement) between God and man, and Peter says (Ac 4) that Christ Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all men. Nor is there health⁶ in any

other, nor yet any other name given to men by which we must be saved. So now it is Christ who is our peace, our redemption, our ransom for our sins, our righteousness, satisfaction—and all the promises of God are yea and Amen in him (2Co 1).

And we, for the great and infinite love that God has for us in Christ, love him in return, and love also his laws, and love one another. And from now on the things we do are not to atone for our sins, or to obtain heaven, but to help our neighbour and tame the flesh so we may grow perfect and strong in Christ, and return thanks to God for his mercy, and glorify his name.

Antichrist's Miracles Pull Us from God's Word

But the miracles of Antichrist are done for contrary purposes. They are done to pull you from the word of God, and from believing his promises, and from Christ. And they teach you to put your trust in a man, or in a ceremony where God's word is not.

God's Miracles Cease, Satan's Never End

Once God's word is believed and the faith is spread abroad, then the miracles of God cease. But the miracles of Antichrist, because they are worked by the devil to quench the faith, grow daily more and more. Nor will they cease until the world's end among those who do not believe God's word and promises.

Do you not see how in the old world God loosed and sent forth all the devils among the pagans or Gentiles? And how the demons worked miracles and spoke to them in every image? Even so will the devil work falsehood by one craft or another until the end of the world, among those who do not believe God's word. For the judgment and damnation of a person who has no desire to hear the truth is to hear lies, and to be established and grounded therein through false miracles. And he who does not want to see truth is worthy to be blind; and he who bids the Spirit of God to go from him is worthy to be without him.

Miracles in the Bible

Paul, Peter, and all true Apostles preached Christ only. And the miracles did but confirm and establish their preaching and those everlasting promises and the eternal testament that God had made between man and him in Christ's blood. And the miracles also testified that they were true servants of Christ.⁷

Miracles Confirm Us in Our Faith, Be It False or True



The miracles of God that cease do not include such things as answers to prayer, which Jesus promised repeatedly to all who have faith, and which I might call "private miracles" for the purpose of contrasting them with open and sensational miracles, such as those the Apostles performed and the devil mimics. Private miracles, such as God's provision, His teaching by the Holy Spirit, His protection, His guidance, His sending

angels to minister to the heirs of salvation, His making His home with those who love Him and obey His commands, and His answering the prayers of those who ask in accordance with His will: all these are promised by many Scriptures; and they are, after all, miracles also, and they are miracles that confirm our faith.

Where Tyndale wrote about putting trust in ceremonies rather than in God's word, he was not condemning all ceremonies, but a misuse or abuse of them, and superstitious reliance upon prayer beads, relics, the sale of indulgences, and such things. Where he wrote of putting trust in men rather than God's word, he would have been referring to things like trusting for forgiveness through confession in a priest's ear, a thing he often complained about, or any idolatrous cleaving to men or their promises instead of to the Lord.

Misleading and idolatrous ceremonies, observances, or practices can assume many different forms. Consider what trust Charismatics place in their practices, such as "soaking in the spirit" to experience God, instead of seeking Him in His word and through Holy Communion rightly performed, by contemplating our Lord and Him crucified. And consider what faith they place in men by lining up to receive the Holy Spirit through them by a forehead touch, etc (as they think), by which they hope to find communion with God, or healing, or sanctification.

I have discussed in particular the miracles of the so-called "Charismatic Church", but there can be no doubt that others will boast of miracles of different sorts, and will have their false prophets, to testify to false doctrine, foster superstition and unrighteousness, and teach people to trust in things that do not save. The words Tyndale wrote over 450 years ago are true today and will remain so until the world's end. And we see that the miracles of the devil will never cease, and are used to turn men from God's word and truth—and if there is faith, to quench it.

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Ruth is the author of *True to His Ways: Purity and Safety in Christian Spiritual Practice*, a book that shows how the miracles, practices, and doctrine of the Charismatic Church are occult in nature, and are therefore not only dangerous, but also forbidden by God. *True to His Ways* clearly explains what is occult, so believers can avoid it, and shows the safe ways of godly Christianity. The book is sold at [www.truetohisways.com](http://www.truetohisways.com). Ruth understands the deception of the Charismatic Church, and her gentle understanding shines through the pages.

#### ENDNOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Tyndale, William, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, 1528, Edited by Daniell, David (Penguin Books, 2000), hereafter *the Obedience*.

<sup>2</sup> The Matthew Bible was the work mainly of three men: William Tyndale, Miles Coverdale, and John Rogers. First published in 1537, and bought with the blood of Tyndale and Rogers, it is the purest and truest rendering of the English Scriptures. It is being put in more modern English by the New Matthew Bible Project, where editor Ruth Magnusson Davis is conservatively updating

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obsolete language and grammar. More information about the Matthew Bible and about Tyndale, Coverdale, and Rogers is at <http://www.newmatthewbible.org/about.html>.

<sup>3</sup> It was apparently taught that St. Peter had visited London with a great multitude of angels one night, about the year 1000 AD. See David Daniell's note 477, in *The Obedience*, at p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> Visionary so-called prophetesses.

<sup>5</sup> *The Obedience*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>6</sup> Tyndale often referred to "health" where other translators put "salvation".

<sup>7</sup> *The Obedience*, pp. 140-141.

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