

Discerning True Miracles from False

Passages: Deut 13:1–5; Acts 16:16–18; Mt 24:4–14; Gal 1:6–9; Ex 7–8

Memory Verse

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
As Christ’s second coming approaches, many false christs and prophets will arise to deceive people with great signs and miracles.	The Lord Jesus came full of grace and truth, and He seeks to save mankind.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Be watchful and prepared by loving the truth.2. Do not love unrighteousness or the things of the world, but discern false prophets with God’s power.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. False Miracles in the Old Testament
- B. False Miracles in Apostolic Times
- C. False Miracles and Christs in the End Time
- D. Discerning Miracles with Truth
- E. Discerning False Prophets

Life Application

Stand Firm in the Faith

Memory Verse

Conclusion: God can rescue us from Satan’s deceptions if we stay true to His word and reject those who twist the truth and perform false miracles.

Spiritual Teachings

Introduction

What are true miracles or false miracles? (*Let students respond.*) A true miracle is a demonstration of God's power and might through divine acts. These acts of God transcend natural and scientific laws. They go beyond human understanding, and they cannot be achieved by man. A false miracle, on the other hand, is an act done by Satan, or an act that feigns to be an act of God. True miracles are performed by God's will and power, as only God alone "does great wonders" (Ps 136:4; Ps 72:18).

God uses miracles as proof of His power, love, and authority. But Satan can also perform many false miracles. The world is filled with unexplained signs and phenomena. Claims of healings, visions of religious figures, and relics performing bizarre acts can be found across the world, and they still fascinate people to this day. Such occurrences are designed by Satan to lead people away from the true God. In this lesson, we will examine what false miracles are, study examples of false miracles from different time periods, and learn how we should equip ourselves to overcome the wiles of the devil.

A. False Miracles in the Old Testament

(*Teachers: Have the students read the passages together, and then answer the following questions.*)

1. The Egyptian wise men and sorcerers (Ex 7:11–8:19)

God instructed Moses and Aaron to perform signs and wonders to prove that God had sent them and to show that He was the God of Israel.

- When Aaron's rod turned into a serpent, the Egyptian magicians were able to perform the same miracle. However, Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods (Ex 7:11–12).
- When Moses turned the water of the Nile to blood, the Egyptian sorcerers did likewise, but they could not turn the blood back to water (Ex 7:20–22, 24).
- Like Aaron, the magicians were able to bring forth frogs which covered the land of Egypt, but they could not remove the frogs. Pharaoh pleaded with Aaron and Moses to entreat the Lord to remove the frogs (Ex 8:5–15).
- When Aaron caused the dust of Egypt to become a massive swarm of lice, the magicians were unable to replicate this miracle, and they admitted to Pharaoh that "this is the finger of God" (Ex 8:16–19).

Discussion

- How did Pharaoh and his magicians respond to the first six plagues?
- Where does the power of the sorcerers come from?
- What does this tell us about the power of God and power of Satan?

Teachings

- Pharaoh believed that he and his wise men were as great and powerful as the God of Israel, so despite witnessing God's miraculous power, he refused to believe in the true God.
- The magicians did not use God's power but Satan's. But Satan is not God's equal, and his power is limited. The magicians could not remove the problem of the plagues or change dust to lice. They also could not stand before Moses when they were inflicted with boils. This reminds us that the God we worship is the one true God, living and all-powerful.

2. The medium at En Dor (1 Sam 28:3–20)

In fear and desperation, Saul once went to a medium and asked her to bring up Samuel from the dead. When the summoned spirit rose up out of the earth, the medium told Saul that it was an

old man covered with a mantle. Saul immediately believed that it was Samuel risen from the dead and bowed down before him. The spirit predicted that Saul and his sons would die, and that Israel would be given into the hands of the Philistines.

Discussion

- Do you think that this was the spirit of the prophet Samuel? What evidence tells you that it was or was not Samuel?
- Read Deuteronomy 18:9–12. What does the Bible say about occult practices?
- What kinds of occult practices do we see today?

Teachings: When we read this passage, it appears that this was a genuine sign from God, and that the prophet Samuel truly rose from the dead to pronounce judgment on Saul. However, digging deeper, we can see that this was a false sign to deceive Saul.

- Satan can transform himself to be an angel of light, and he can use his ministers to be ministers of righteousness (2 Cor 11:14). Satan transformed himself to look and speak like the prophet Samuel to deceive Saul.
- The spirit Samuel said to Saul, “And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me” (1 Sam 28:19). How can Saul, who was rejected and forsaken by God, dwell eternally with the man of God (cf. Mt 25:34, 41, 46)?
- The spirit’s prediction that Saul’s sons would die with him proved untrue, because Ishbosheth survived and later became king over Israel for two years (2 Sam 2:8–10).
- Sorcery, fortune-telling, or other methods of advice or predictions said to come from spirits or visions are an abomination to God. He is a holy and jealous God, and we cannot engage in such practices, because to do so is to associate ourselves with Satan (Deut 18:9–12).

B. False Miracles in Apostolic Times

1. Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9–13)

While Philip preached in Samaria, he met a sorcerer called Simon, whom people revered as “the great power of God” because of his sorcery. When Philip preached the gospel and performed many signs and miracles, the people turned from these false beliefs and deceptions to the truth.

2. Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:4–12)

At Paphos, Paul and Barnabas met a sorcerer called Elymas, who tried to obstruct the proconsul from accepting the truth. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul rebuked Elymas and caused him to be blind. When the proconsul witnessed this, he believed and accepted the gospel.

3. The demon-possessed slave girl (Acts 16:16–18)

For many days, a girl possessed by a spirit of divination followed Paul and Silas in Philippi, loudly proclaiming that they were servants of the Most High God. Although what she said was true, her knowledge came from an evil spirit, whose motive was to disrupt and hinder the work of God. So, Paul cast out the spirit in the name of Jesus.

Discussion

- What do these three incidents reveal to us about the purpose of false miracles?
False miracles exist to confuse people from knowing the true God, to exalt oneself, to obstruct and oppose the truth, and to lead men to destruction.
- What might be the motives of people who perform “miracles” today?

Some do it for prestige, for profit and self-benefit, or to hinder and obstruct holy work.

C. False Miracles and Christs in the End Time

1. False denominations and religions

The Lord Jesus prophesied that “false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mt 24:24; cf. 1 Tim 4:1). As we draw closer to Christ’s second coming, the number of religions in existence is astounding. According to some estimates, there are approximately 4,200 different religions and beliefs in the world today. Of these, Hinduism, New Age Spirituality, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are among the prevalent religions, with Christianity being the largest of all. And within Christianity alone, there are an estimated 33,000 denominations.

Each religion has their own gods. Each also believes that they have the “truth,” and that their members experience signs and miracles. These miracles may appear like a confirmation of God’s presence or healing, but Satan uses false miracles to destroy God’s work, and to confuse, deceive, and lead His followers astray. If we examine the beliefs and behaviors of other religions, there are many areas that are incomplete or at odds with the Bible.

2. The lawless one

The Bible prophesies that before the second coming of the Lord, the “lawless one” will come. He will be Satan’s tool, and will use Satan’s power to perform signs and wonders (2 Thess 2:3–4, 9–12; Rev 16:13–14; 19:20). While Jesus performed miracles to help, to heal, and to point mankind towards God, the lawless one will use his power to destroy, to lead people away from God, and to exalt himself as a god. We must be aware of this danger and learn to discern true miracles from false miracles.

D. Discerning Miracles with Truth

While miracles strengthen our belief in God, it is dangerous to base our faith solely upon them, as Satan can also perform miracles (2 Thess 2:9–10). So, when we hear of miracles and healing being performed by other denominations or religions, we should not be quick to conclude that these are acts of God or doubt our faith in the true church. God works in the lives of people to let them see His presence. Satan works to make them believe in false religions and gods. So, how do we discern true miracles from false miracles? We should evaluate them according to the truths of the Bible and examine whether that religion or church has the complete gospel of salvation.

Remember, God’s word is the only true and solid foundation of our faith. It is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps 119:105). The truth will give us spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and discernment to know right from wrong. It makes us wise for salvation (2 Tim 3:15; Jas 1:21; Eph 4:13–14), helps us recognize Satan’s tactics, and repels the evil one as the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). Therefore, the ultimate solution is to seek out and love the truth. But the Bible is often difficult for us to read, and we often find ourselves too distracted to study or remember its words or teachings. So how can we develop a love of the truth? *(Let students brainstorm ideas before continuing.)*

1. Turn our feet from the things of the world

When we devote our time to movies, games, and other media that take up our time and energy, it’s difficult to focus on God and find time to read the Bible. We need to free ourselves of these things so that we can spend more time on God’s words (1 Jn 2:15).

2. Desire the truth as a deer pants for water

At first, reading the Bible may seem like a chore instead of something enjoyable. It can be like learning and practicing an instrument or eating something nutritious but unpalatable. But the longer we persist in reading the Bible, the more the Holy Spirit will transform our hearts, teaching us to appreciate and love God's words.

3. Pursue the word with friends

Oftentimes, it's hard to go at something alone, be it exercising, studying, or praying. This can also be the case with reading the Bible. One way to love the truth is to find a friend who can read it with us, so that we can hold each other accountable (2 Tim 2:22). Here are some steps to help us get started:

- a. **Find a buddy.** Our Bible-reading buddies could be our parents, family members, church friends, or even an online church group.
- b. **Set up a time to read together.** This could be once a week, or as frequent as you would like, in person or online. Online is not the same as meeting face-to-face, but the Internet is a blessing in that it allows us to connect and be encouraged by believers living in different parts of the world!
- c. **Start with something short and simple.** The key is not quantity but quality, meaningful study. Share observations about the text with one another and lovingly challenge each other to think more deeply.
- d. **Reflect.** Based on the passage, spend time reflecting on it together, and ask each other if there are any life changes you need to make.
- e. **Follow up.** It is important to follow up with one another the next time you read together and see how everyone is doing in the areas they committed to change. Continue encouraging one another to grow deeper in their knowledge and love of God.

Over time, you will discover that studying the Bible with others is a joy because you get to hear what God is doing in each other's lives. Your friends may also glean different teachings or ideas while reading together, making your study time more beneficial and fruitful.

4. Memorize and practice God's words

The Bible reminds us that we need to hide God's word in our hearts and to let it dwell in us richly (Ps 119:11; Col 3:16). This is different from just reading God's words, as memorization helps us to internalize God's words. Then it can shape our hearts and minds to conform to God's will. But the Bible is so big! How do we get started?

- a. Start off by finding a verse that speaks to your current situation. Think and reflect on how the verse applies to your situation and how God is speaking to you through His words. Commit the verse to memory and meditate upon it.
- b. Think of ways to commit God's words to memory. Be creative! For example:
 - Write a verse on an index card and place it in areas you know you will see it, like your bathroom mirror, or place one on your computer's desktop background. Each time you see it, try reciting the verse without looking. It's easier to commit to memory when you practice often and in short amounts of time.
 - Write or draw verses to help you memorize, meditate, or learn. It's also a very creative way to study the Bible. This practice helps you slow down while reading the Bible.
 - Technology is a great tool in this area. There are many Bible apps that can help you memorize verses, test your knowledge, and challenge yourself.

- Try writing a spiritual journal. Chronicle the Bible verses that you have memorized and record the situation where it proved precious. For example: “The verse that comforted me when I felt discouraged after praying for the Holy Spirit and still did not receive it - Ps 42:5–6a.”

5. Do not love unrighteousness or the things of the world

Luke 11:24–26 warns us that when human hearts are empty, people will be inclined to pursue the pleasures of unrighteousness (2 Thess 2:10–12; Isa 5:13–14; Rom 1:18). But what does it mean to have an empty heart? An empty heart is one that doesn’t have the Holy Spirit or the truth. When our hearts are inclined to sinful pleasures or harbor incorrect motives and attitudes, we refuse Christ and His word and allow ourselves to be deceived by Satan. It is important therefore to fill our hearts with God’s words, so that we do not give Satan a foothold.

E. Discerning False Prophets

Let’s read Matthew 7:15–18. We are reminded here to know the characteristics of false prophets. A false prophet may not only be a worker of God, but can be any person, church, or religion who acts against God’s will and truth. What kind of “bad fruits” should we look out for?

1. **Beware of their words** - The words of false prophets may sound religious, but they speak lies, and are arrogant and prideful (e.g.: Hananiah the false prophet (Jer 28))
2. **Beware of their motives** – False prophets are often motivated by personal benefits, money, or prestige rather than by their desire to glorify the Lord. They love receiving respect and honor, and draw many followers (e.g.: Korah accused Moses of exalting himself, but in truth, he desired the priesthood for himself (Num 16:1–10)).
3. **Beware of their actions** - To obtain these benefits, false prophets may employ subtle methods that are cruel, deceptive, and unbiblical (e.g.: Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9–11; 2 Pet 2)).

Just as a tree is consistent in the kind of fruit it produces, a true messenger or worker of God will consistently live out the truth of God’s words. His character, motives, and behavior will reflect that of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, regardless of how great the miracle, or how gifted the worker may be, if their conduct or speech is not in accordance with the Bible and the will of God, we should not be misled to follow that person (Deut 13:1–5; Gal 1:6–9; 1 Jn 4:1–6).

Check for Understanding

1. **Name three biblical examples of signs or wonders performed by Satan.** Egyptian wise men and sorcerers; the medium at En Dor; Simon the sorcerer; and the slave girl in Philippi.
2. **What is the Bible’s view on occult practices?** They are an abomination to God. To engage in such practices means associating ourselves with Satan (Deut 18:9–12).
3. **Why is it dangerous to base our faith solely on miracles?** Satan can pretend to be a messenger of light and perform miracles. We should instead base our faith on God’s words and doing His will.
4. **What are some of the purposes of false miracles?** The lawless one uses his power to destroy, to lead people away from God, and to exalt himself as a god.
5. **How can we grow to love the truth and discern false miracles and prophets?** Turn our feet from the things of the world; desire the truth as a deer pants for water; pursue the word with friends; memorize and practice God’s words; and do not love unrighteousness or things of the world.

Life Application

Stand Firm in the Faith

Jesus warned us that in the end time, many will be led astray by false miracles and signs. What should we do to ensure that we can stand firm and be saved? Read each scenario, and then discuss the following questions.

1. Love the truth

Patrick's friend Sam was a Christian from another church. Patrick and Sam often exchanged ideas and views on their beliefs and things that went on in their own churches. One day, the topic of miracles came up in their conversation. Sam shared some miracles that occurred in his own family: God had healed his mother of terminal cancer, and his brother's decade-long drug abuse and severe depression were cured after he willingly accepted Jesus.

Hearing this, Patrick thought that perhaps God is not only in True Jesus Church. Maybe He is everywhere, and He answers the prayers of the devout regardless of which church they belong to or the religion they believe in. Perhaps there is more than one way to get to heaven. Patrick began to feel that it was rather narrow-minded to think that his church is the only one that has miracles and God's abidance.

Discussion

- How would you explain to Patrick about the occurrence of miracles in other denominations or religions?
- Patrick has started to have doubts about True Jesus Church being the only church where one can experience God. What are your thoughts? What would you say to Patrick?

2. Do not love unrighteousness or the things of the world

Rachel is what you would call a "social butterfly," both at school and at church. She looked forward to church each week; she loved catching up with her friends, being involved in the choir, learning to translate, in addition to many other activities. Sometimes, she seemed to be doing so much that she had very little quiet time with God. Then suddenly, Rachel was absent from church for a few weeks. It turns out that Rachel had overheard someone criticizing her, and their words had really hurt and angered her. She decided from then on that she didn't want to be in a church with people like that and at a place where she was not appreciated. Her friends later discovered that she was now going to another church.

Discussion

- What kind of person was Rachel?
- What might be some of Rachel's motives for coming to church?
- What might be some of the dangers that arise when we have incorrect motives or attitudes?

3. Discern false prophets

Deacon Ezra was a very kind and gifted worker in church. Even though he had a hectic personal schedule, he gave a lot of his time to serving God and caring for the brothers and sisters. It seemed that whenever he prayed for others; whether if it was for healing, finding a job, or for the Holy Spirit, his prayers would be answered. One Sabbath service, Deacon Ezra said that the Bible was not the only standard upon which we base our faith. There are other books not included in the Bible, which are just as authoritative and relevant to our faith. While some members questioned this in their minds, others simply accepted what he said. How could a worker who was so gifted, loving, and full of God's abidance be wrong?

Discussion

- How might it be easy for a believer to simply accept this message?
- How do you know that what Deacon Ezra said in the sermon was wrong?
- How can we truly discern whether a person is a true worker of God?

Memory Verse

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24)

Meaning

Jesus warned us of what will mark the coming of the Lord. In those days, the deception will be so great that even the elect will be unable to discern between right and wrong, so they will be swept away by false truths and signs. This is a reminder that we cannot rest on our laurels, but must always be watchful, holding fast to the truth. However, we can also be confident that as long as our hearts remain focused on God and not on the pleasures of the world, He will save and preserve us (Heb 7:25).

Conclusion

Beneath the surface routine of daily life, a fierce struggle between invisible spiritual powers is being waged. Satan is working hard to capture the souls of mankind by using false miracles, false prophets, and false christs. But God can rescue us from these deceptions if we stay true to His word and reject those who twist the truth and perform false miracles. By remaining rooted in God’s truth, we can overcome Satan with God’s power.

Lesson 10 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What does the memory verse warn us of and remind us to do?
A sign of the second coming is that the elect will be unable to discern right from wrong. It is a reminder to always be watchful, holding fast to the truth.
2. “Beware of false _____, who come to you in _____ clothing, but _____ they are ravenous _____. You will know them by their _____.” (Matthew 7:15–16)
prophets, sheep’s, inwardly, wolves, fruits
3. What are some of the purposes of false miracles?
The lawless one uses his power to destroy, to lead people away from God, and to exalt himself as a god.
4. Why is it dangerous to base our faith solely on miracles?
God may perform a miracle to enable a person to know Him and to lead the person to the true church. However, Satan can pretend to be a messenger of light and use miracles to deceive. We should base our faith on God’s words and doing His will.
5. Pick one way you can love the truth and explain how you plan to enact it in your daily life.
Personal answers.
6. What temptation or weakness is a challenge to your faith? What will you do to stand firm?
Personal answers.