The Miracles of Jesus: Signs of the Coming Kingdom

The miracles of Jesus were more than extraordinary demonstrations of supernatural power. ***They were signs that the long-awaited promises of God were being fulfilled and that the Kingdom of Heaven was breaking into human history***. To appreciate Matthew's presentation of Jesus' miracles, we must understand the expectations created by Israel's prophets and developed within Judaism during the centuries leading up to Jesus' ministry.

The Prophetic Hope of Restoration

The Old Testament prophets anticipated a time when God would intervene decisively to rescue his people, restore creation, and establish his righteous reign. Isaiah described this coming salvation in vivid terms: blind eyes would be opened, deaf ears unstopped, the lame would leap, and mute tongues would sing (Isaiah 35:4–6):

> "Say to the cowardly: "Be strong; do not fear! Here is your God; vengeance is coming. God's retribution is coming; He will save you." **Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy**, for water will gush in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;" [Isaiah 35:4–6]

These were not merely isolated predictions of miraculous healings. ***They were pictures of a world being made whole through the saving presence of God.***

Isaiah also spoke of a Spirit-anointed figure who would proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to captives, and the arrival of God's favor (Isaiah 61:1–2).

> "The Spirit of the Lord God is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of our God's vengeance; to comfort all who mourn," [Isaiah 61:1–2]

Together, these passages established an expectation that God's coming salvation would bring liberation, healing, and restoration. The miraculous would serve as visible evidence that God's promised future was arriving.

Messianic Expectations at Qumran

The Dead Sea Scrolls provide remarkable evidence that these prophetic promises shaped Jewish expectations before the time of Jesus. Particularly significant is a fragment known as **4Q521**, often called **the Messianic Apocalypse**. This text describes the extraordinary works associated with God's coming deliverance: the blind receiving sight, the wounded being healed, the dead being raised, and good news being announced to the poor.

Although scholars debate whether these actions are attributed directly to God or to his messianic agent, the significance is unmistakable. Some Jews in the Second Temple period associated the coming age of redemption with miraculous restoration, including resurrection.

Later Christian teaching sometimes identifies four particular "Messianic miracles":

cleansing a leper, delivering a mute demoniac, healing someone born blind, and raising a person dead for four days. *However, clear evidence that first-century rabbis formally reserved these miracles exclusively for the Messiah is lacking.* The broader expectation of miraculous signs accompanying God's salvation is much more firmly established.

Matthew's Presentation of Jesus

This background illuminates Matthew's carefully constructed narrative. Following the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), Matthew records a concentrated series of miracles (Matthew 8–9). Jesus cleanses lepers, heals the sick, commands the forces of nature, expels demons, restores sight, and raises the dead. *These acts demonstrate the authority of the Kingdom Jesus has been proclaiming*.

The significance becomes explicit when John the Baptist asks whether Jesus is the expected one (Matthew 11:2–6). Rather than simply declaring his identity, Jesus points to his works: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor receive good news. His answer deliberately echoes Isaiah's prophetic promises and closely resembles the expectations reflected in 4Q521.

Matthew's central point is not simply that Jesus possesses miraculous power, but that in Jesus the promised restoration has begun. His miracles reveal the character of God's Kingdom: evil is confronted, suffering is relieved, the broken are restored, and even death must yield. The future anticipated by Israel's prophets has entered the present through Jesus, Israel's Messiah and King.

Matthew's Arrangement of the Miracles

Matthew arranges the ten miracles of chapters 8–9 into **three groups,** separated by two interruptions focusing on discipleship. The **first group** includes the cleansing of a leper, the healing of the centurion's servant, and the healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:1–15). The **second group** includes calming the storm, delivering two demon-possessed men, and healing a paralytic (Matthew 8:23–9:8). The **third group** includes raising a ruler's daughter, healing a woman with a hemorrhage, restoring sight to two blind men, and delivering a mute demoniac (Matthew 9:18–34). These ten miracles are presented in nine narrative episodes.

Between these groups, Matthew inserts **two sections on discipleship**. The first (Matthew 8:18–22) addresses the cost of following Jesus, while the second (Matthew 9:9–17) describes Matthew's calling, Jesus' fellowship with sinners, and questions about fasting. These interruptions are deliberate, connecting Jesus' miraculous authority with the call to follow him. ***Matthew is not simply presenting a collection of miracles but arranging them to show that the authority of Jesus demands the response of discipleship.***