

faith in the specific supernatural experience is the key, not belief in Jesus Christ in general.

However, these clarifications are already beginning to hint at another possible interpretation of the role of faith (or perhaps more accurately, the kind of faith) associated with miracles in these passages. This alternative idea shouldn't be surprising, but what if these passages are, in fact, just talking about general faith in God and Jesus Christ?

The distinction between these two interpretations has perhaps best been defined as a question regarding what is the object of the faith in these passages. In these passages, is Jesus the object of the person's faith? Is this a matter of believing that Jesus is the Christ, God Incarnate, the Second Person of the Trinity? Or is the miracle itself the object of the faith? Is this a matter of believing for that specific supernatural event to occur? While the charismatic view might include faith in Jesus Christ, at the center of the charismatic interpretation is the emphasis on faith in the miracle itself. For the charismatic, these passages are not talking about faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior and Lord of all. For them, these passages are about believing in the miracle. The faith in these passages is faith that a miracle will occur.

So, how do we determine which of these two alternatives is really the case? How do we know whether these passages are saying belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, is a prerequisite to experiencing miracles or that these passages are saying belief for the miracle itself is the precursor for experiencing miracles? The answer, of course, comes from two sets of evidence. First, there are the contextual details of the passages themselves. Second, there is a need for our interpretation of these passages to reconcile with other passages on this topic elsewhere in the New Testament.

Again, we will start with Matthew 9, which actually has 2 events that are relevant to this study.

Matthew 9:20 And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: 21 For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. 22 But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour... 27 And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. 28 And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. 29 Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.

In verses 20-22, we find a woman who has "an issue of blood" for "twelve years." She says to herself, "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole." As she does so, she is healed immediately and Jesus says to her, "thy faith hath made

thee whole.” Is this an instance in which her belief for the specific miracle caused that miracle to come to pass?

A couple of points are worth noting here. First, in Numbers 15:38, God commands the Israelites had to put “fringes” in the “borders of their garments.” The Hebrew word for “borders” is “kanaph” (03671). Malachi 4:2 later declares prophetically concerning the Messiah that “Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” The Hebrew word translated as “wings” in Malachi 4:2 is actually “kanaph.” The context for Malachi 4 is one which speaks of the coming of Elijah before the day of the Lord. So, we know this is a prophetic context. And to those familiar with the day of the Lord in the Old Testament prophets, it is a time of God’s visitation. And the coming of Elijah was a forerunner before the coming of God (a role that John the Baptist is identified with in the New Testament as he proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah). We see this in Malachi 3:1, which states, “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.” So, here we have a prophet speaking of the coming of the Lord and how the Lord will judge the wicked but for those who fear him, there will be healing in the “borders of his garments.” Even the translators of the King James Version understood that the phrase “Sun of righteousness” was a reference to the Messiah as reflected in the fact that they chose to capitalize the word “Sun.”

While it might be commonplace to perceive the afflicted woman in Matthew 9:20 as a whimsical wishful thinker, the reality is that she seems to be quite an astute observer of the Old Testament. More specifically, she appears to be applying Malachi’s description of the coming of God, the “Sun of righteousness” to Jesus Christ. And because she identifies Jesus as God, the “Sun of righteousness,” she concludes from Malachi that there is healing power in the “borders” of his garment. Consequently, the act of touching Jesus’ garment is inherently a declaration of her belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God prophesied in Malachi. This makes it difficult to insist that the faith that healed this woman was her earnest belief that a miracle would occur given the fact that this narrative is implicitly a public affirmation of her belief that Jesus was the promised Messiah. It may well have been her affirmation of Jesus as the Messiah that brought about her healing rather than ardent belief for the miracle itself.

Similarly, when we move to the second portion of Matthew 9, we cannot move only to the phrase, “According to your faith be it unto you” and then interpret that phrase in isolation. The exchange between Jesus and the blind men begins in verse 27. In that verse, the blind men initiate the interaction by calling Jesus by the title, “Son of David.” In verse 28, Jesus asks them, “Believe ye that I am able to do this?” to which they respond, “Yea, Lord.” Clearly the context makes this narrative primarily about the blind men’s publicly expressed belief that Jesus is the Christ, the son of David and their belief that, as the Christ, Jesus had the power and authority to heal them. Moreover, we must interpret this phrase, “According to your faith,” in reference to their belief in him in the preceding

verse. In short, Jesus is saying “because you believe that I am the Son of David who has the power to heal you, you are healed.” Once again, we see that it is not the miracle itself that is the object of their faith but rather Jesus is the object of their faith. In essence, this passage is a demonstration that belief in Jesus is a requirement for receiving miracles. There is no warrant in the text for insisting that this passage teaches the extraneous and unnecessary concept that faith for a miracle causes a miracle. And the same can be said concerning two other passages in our list. Mark 10:46-52 and Luke 18:35-42 are simply parallel accounts of Matthew 9:27-29.

At this point, we should not be all that puzzled to find such a principle emerging in the Gospels. After all, Mark 16 is one of the most explicit declarations by Jesus about miracles in the church and in that chapter Jesus specifically identifies that miracles will only happen among those that believe in him. In fact, Jesus even lists miraculous healing among the miracles he mentions here. Mark 16:15-18 states, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” In summary, Mark 16 tells us that those who believe will experience miraculous healings. This statement from Jesus would have come as no shock to the apostles who had for 3 years repeatedly seen Jesus healing people that expressed their belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Clearly, it is no secret that the New Testament openly teaches that believing Jesus is the Messiah was a prerequisite for miracles. Let’s see if this principle holds true for the rest of the passages often cited in support of the charismatic teaching that we must have faith for the miracle itself.

Matthew 17:14-21 and Luke 17:5-6 are another set of parallel passages. Matthew is more detailed, so we will focus our investigation there.

Matthew 17:14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, 15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. 16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. 17 Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me. 18 And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. 19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? 20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. 21 Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

The critical phrase here occurs in verse 20 where Jesus tells his disciples that they could not cast out the demon “because of their unbelief” and goes on to state that

“If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” Once again, a charismatic might interpret this verse as a declaration that the disciples lacked faith to do this specific miracle. They needed to believe more in their ability to perform this exorcism, and likewise if they truly believed they could move a mountain, then they could move a mountain.

However, this passage poses a few obstacles to this interpretation. First, on its own the “faith” in Matthew 17:20 could refer to either the degree of unwavering conviction that Jesus was the Christ or the degree of unwavering faith that one could move a mountain. There’s no reason that a lack of faith in Jesus Christ wouldn’t short-circuit the ability to experience a miracle just as much as a lack of faith for the miracle itself. In fact, we have already established that believing in Jesus was a precursor for God doing miracles on someone’s behalf.

Second, although Jesus critiques the disciples for lack of faith in verse 20, the father of the boy is not specifically criticized for lacking faith. In fact, the details arguably depict this man as quite persistent in his pursuit of a miracle. Even when the disciples cannot cure his son, the father doesn’t leave but instead he insists on staying until Jesus comes down from the mountain. Despite the setback, he appears to remain persistent in his conviction that his son will be miraculously healed. These considerations pose an obstacle to the standard charismatic interpretation. How can we conclude that this is a story about the need to believe for a miracle given that we have so many reasons to believe this man was undaunted in his belief for a miraculous healing and yet the boy is not initially healed? Shouldn’t this man’s unwavering and insistent faith have been enough to bring about the miracle even at the hands of Jesus’ disciples? Are we now adding an additional criterion that, beyond the faith of miracle-seeker, the miracle worker also has to have unwavering faith? If so, shouldn’t we investigate whether there might be other criteria for a miracle to occur beyond just faith for the miracle itself? On that note, we turn our attention to verse 21.

Third, after Jesus criticizes his disciples for their lack of faith, in verse 21 Jesus says, “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” Here we find yet another criterion for the miracle to occur. It wasn’t just persistent faith on the father’s part or persistent faith on the disciples’ part, but beyond faith this miracle required prayer and fasting. This further breaks down the charismatic formula. Now we are seeing that whether or not a miracle occurs is not simply a matter of how much you or I believe that miracle will occur. There are other factors, outside our own conviction, that can prevent miracles.

Now that we’ve seen the obstacles that make Matthew 17 incompatible with the standard charismatic interpretation, we must also understand how this passage fits with our competing interpretation. Here the pressing questions surround the fact that in this passage Jesus criticizes his disciples for their lack of faith. How could this be a reference to faith in Jesus as the Messiah? The problem becomes even more striking given the fact that the previous chapter, Matthew 16, recounts Peter’s representative affirmation that Jesus is the Christ. How can that fact be

reconciled with any theory of wavering belief in Christ among Jesus' own disciples in Matthew 17?

There are a couple relevant factors to consider with regard to these questions.

First, Matthew 17 uses the word "disciples." It was the disciples who first tried to cure the man's son. And it was the disciples that Jesus criticized for a lack of faith. It is important to note that the text does not use the word "apostles."

Second, we know from Matthew 17:1, that Jesus had taken Peter, James, and John with him up the mountain. So, we know that three of the apostles were not present when the first attempt was made to cure the boy. Moreover, we know specifically that Peter who made the confession of Christ on behalf of the apostles was not present. (Incidentally, we know from John 1:25-42, that Peter was neither the only nor the first apostle to confess Jesus as the Christ. Andrew confesses this to Peter in John 1. And it is probable that the other disciple mentioned alongside Andrew, but not named, is the Apostle John given John's pattern of referring to himself in a similar manner throughout his gospel. Since Andrew says, "We have found the Messiah," in John 1, we can conclude that the unnamed disciple with Andrew also believed that Jesus was the Christ at that time.) It seems we have good reason to believe that at least a good portion of those who had already confessed Jesus as the Christ were not present at the failed attempt to cure the man's son in Matthew 17. However, Andrew clearly was not taken up the mountain. But this doesn't necessitate that Andrew was part of the failed effort to heal the boy for reasons we will now outline.

Third, in Acts 1 there were 120 disciples in the upper room after Jesus' death and resurrection. So, even though Andrew and 8 other apostles had not gone up the mountain with Jesus in Matthew 17, there are literally more than 100 other people that could be meant by the reference to disciples in Matthew 17. It is more than plausible that Andrew and the other 8 apostles were not nearby or not directly involved when some other disciples tried and failed to heal this man's son.

Fourth, we know Luke 9 provides the parallel account of Matthew 17. Luke gives us the following events in this order. In verses 1-10, Jesus gives authority to the 12 apostles to cure the sick and cast out demons, sends them out, and they return telling of their success. In verses 11-17, Jesus multiplies the loaves and fishes. In verses 18-27, Jesus asks his disciples who the people say that he is and Peter speaks up that the apostles believe he is the Christ, just like in Matthew 16. In verses 28-36, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain for the transfiguration. In verses 37-42, the father brings his son to Jesus to heal him, complaining that the disciples could not do so. And Jesus heals the boy. In verses 43-45, Jesus tells his disciples that he must be delivered to the hands of his enemies and they are confused and in wonder about the things he is doing. In verse 49-50, John tells Jesus that they found another man casting out demons in Jesus' name and Jesus tells them not to prohibit the man from doing so. Then, not long after, in chapter 10:1-9 and gives them the authority to heal. These facts alone tell us the following. One, among the mass of disciples, there was

uncertainty about Jesus' mission, presumably given the common Jewish expectation of a conquering Messiah. Two, at the time of the healing in Matthew 17, there were many disciples who had not yet received the ability to heal the sick or cast out demons. Jesus had only given this ability to his 12 apostles prior to Matthew 17 and only afterward extends this power to seventy others. Three, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes lines up with Matthew 15:30-38, but more importantly for our immediate purposes it lines up with John 6.

Fifth, the multiplication of loaves and fishes is recorded in John 6:1-13. In verse 15, the people desire to make Jesus king because of the multiplication of food. After Jesus departs, the crowds track him down in verse 25. In verse 26, Jesus confronts them, saying that they pursued him not because of the miracles but because of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. It is evident from this remark that Jesus does not recognize their desire to make him king as something based on sincere belief of who he truly was. Jesus then proceeds to deliberately speak enigmatically and provocatively to the crowd in verses 27-59. More importantly, verse 60 says that his words were so difficult to hear and understand that some of his own disciples began to murmur at which point Jesus directs his provocative comments to his own disciples in verses 61-65. Finally, verse 66 tells us that the result is that "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." Verse 67 makes sure to point out that the 12 apostles, however, remained, and Peter explains why. In verse 68-69, Peter says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Notice that Peter says, "we believe," indicating that his again speaking this confession on behalf of the entire 12 apostles. It should be noted that this confession of Christ by Peter seems to be John's parallel account of Peter's confession in Matthew 16. (A full comparative analysis of these timelines will be provided in the Addendum.)

It should also be noted that John 6:66 does not demand that many of Jesus disciples walked away immediately prior to Peter's confession. The verse reads, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." The key component here is the phrase, "From that time." The phrase is comprised of two Greek words, "ek" (1537) and "toutou" (5127), which essentially denote a point of origin or source from which other things emerge. In John 8:23, Jesus uses these two words in the phrases, "ye are of (1537) this (5127) world" and "I am not of (1537) this (5127) world." John 13:1 uses these words when describing that Jesus knew "that his hour was come that he should depart out of (1537) this (5127) world unto the Father." Notice that John 13:1 uses this phrase to denote the starting point of departure to an eventual destination. Jesus isn't immediately with the Father but this was the hour when the process leading to that conclusion was beginning. This is the same way John intends us to understand this Greek phrase in John 6:66. It was not that the disciples all immediately left Jesus at that point, but rather that this was the starting point for the process leading many to walk away from Jesus. The phrase occurs again in John 18:36, when Jesus says that his kingdom "is not of (1537) this (5127) world," in which case it again speaks of origination or a starting point. The kingdom would not start from an earthly military insurrection in the first century, otherwise as Jesus says, "my

servants would then fight.” Certainly, Jesus’ kingdom would eventually be here on earth, but that final status had not yet arrived. But perhaps most insightfully, John uses this phrase again in 1537, which says, “And from (1537) thenceforth (5127) Pilate sought to release him.” Here these two Greek words are overtly used to speak of a dividing point in time showing the start of a new trend. Prior to this point, Pilate had not sought to release Jesus. This point didn’t mark the totality of Pilate’s efforts all in one moment either. Rather, after this point Pilate began to act in a manner to achieve this ultimate end. The same is true in John 6:66. Jesus’ statements marked a point in time before which his disciples were not walking away and after which they did walk away, not all at once or immediately, but the process began at this time. Moreover, as demonstrated in detail during the addendum, John’s account of this time period and the events it contains is obviously quite protracted compared to Matthew. Consequently, it does not necessarily have to be the case that Jesus’ question to the apostles in John 6:67 occurs immediately after the difficult teaching recorded in this chapter. While it is true that by necessity, Jesus must be asking this question after some disciples began to depart, given the protracted nature of John’s account there is no reason to assume that either the question in verse 67 or the occasion for that question were immediate. John presents them in proximity because they are connected in terms of logic and the narrative and because he does not cover in detail any of the intervening events provided to us in the other Gospels, particularly Matthew. We may indeed conclude that it took days or perhaps weeks or more for disciples to start leaving and, therefore, that Jesus did not ask his apostles this question until days or weeks after he gave his teaching in John 6. We might also conclude that there were still quite a few uncertain disciples wavering in their beliefs about Jesus even after Jesus’ asked this question of his apostles. There is no reason to assume that Jesus’ question occurred after most or even all of departing of disciples had occurred. It is only necessary to assume that enough disciples had begun to leave as to be noticeable enough to prompt Jesus to ask the question.

Lastly, we should take note that in John’s account of Peter’s confession, Peter not only says, “we believe that you are the Christ.” In John’s account, Peter says, “we believe and are sure.” This declaration of their certainty on the matter is plainly meant to contrast to those who believed this or at least entertained the notion but in an uncertain manner. Furthermore, this could contrast to those who had already departed. But that seems unlikely since at the time when Peter answered Jesus’ question, those who had departed didn’t believe at all that Jesus was the Christ. They hardly left while still entertaining notions that He was the Messiah. Here it is important to point out that Jesus question in verse 67 is addressed specifically and only to the twelve apostles. Although not by any means conclusive, this suggests that Peter intended to contrast the 12 apostles who believed with certainty from other disciples who remained still wondering if Jesus was the Messiah but were not entirely certain about it.

All of these facts are important because Matthew 17:20 suggests that some disciples remained who were not fully persuaded that Jesus was the Christ even after Peter’s confession in Matthew 16. In John 6, Peter’s confession comes in verses 68-69 after the notation about disciples departing from Jesus in verse 67.

So, is the departure of these disciples before or after Peter's confession? Since the phrasing of John 6:66 only indicates the beginning of a process, rather than the immediate completion of it, the timelines of Matthew 16-17 and John 6 are still compatible. While we can conclude that some of Jesus' disciples began to walk away prior to Peter's confession in Matthew 16, based on our comparison to John we also know that there still would have been many uncertain and doubting disciples still lingering one chapter later in Matthew 17 who would depart afterward. Most importantly, the fact that Matthew 17 is describing events occurring at the very time that many of Jesus' disciples were having doubts that would soon lead to their departure confirms our alternate interpretation about the lack of faith in Matthew 17. Thanks to John's insight into this critical point in Jesus' ministry, we can feel confident that the lack of belief that prevented disciples from curing the man's son in Matthew 17 was a lack of certainty that Jesus was the Messiah. Once again, we see that there is nothing in this passage which departs from the basic formula in Mark 16 that believing in Jesus is a prerequisite for miracles. Nor is there anything in this passage that would require that we must have faith for a miracle itself in order for a miracle to occur or that our ardent belief in a miracle is the fuel that causes the miracle to occur.

We will now continue our general scriptural survey regarding the charismatic notion that each miracle can only occur if we have enough faith for that specific miracle. The next passage we will briefly examine is Luke 17.

Luke 17:5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. 6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

As we can see, these verses are very similar to Matthew 17:20. However, unlike Matthew 17, Luke's rendition of these comments lacks much of the larger circumstantial context in which they occurred. This makes it difficult to say much about this passage except for the essential fact that, like Matthew 17, on its own the "faith" here in Luke 17 could refer to either the degree of unwavering conviction that Jesus was the Christ or the degree of unwavering faith that one could move a mountain. The text does not mandate one or the other. This makes it difficult to insist that this passage proves the charismatic view. If other passages consistently conform to the principle articulated in Mark 16, in which belief in Christ is the prerequisite for miracles, then there is no reason to suspect anything different is occurring here in Luke 17. In short, because of its brevity and lack of novelty, the meaning of Luke 17 is dictated essentially by what we find in other passages on this topic throughout the New Testament.

Next, we turn to Acts 3.

Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. 2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; 3 Who seeing Peter

and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. 4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. 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. 7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God: 10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. 11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. 12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? 13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. 14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. 16 And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

With regard to charismatic teaching, the key phrase can be found in verse 16, when Peter says, "And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." However, two things are clear from this passage.

First, concerning verse 16 specifically, Jesus' name is clearly a reference to Jesus' authority. Jesus' authority was a frequently discussed aspect of his ability to do miracles, whether healing miracles (Matthew 8:8-10, Mark 1:27, Luke 9:1) or calming the storm and the waves (Matthew 8:24-27). This is not faith in a miracle or faith for a miracle that Peter is talking about. It is clear that Peter is here referring to belief in who Jesus is, in His position and authority as the Christ, the Son of David and the Son of God.

Second, the man who receives the miracle is clearly not expecting or believing for miraculous healing at all. Verse 2 describes how he is looking for alms from Peter and John. In fact, in verse 5 he is still expecting to receive money to the extent that in verse 6 Peter has to explain to him that they have no money to give. This man clearly has not belief that he will receiving a miraculous healing. On the other hand, if Peter and John's faith is sufficient and the man's own belief for a miracle is irrelevant, then modern faith healers should be able to perform miracles for people regardless of much or how little faith the sick person has, just like Peter and John here in Acts 3. Consequently, if the charismatic principle were true, then any time a miracle fails to occur that would reveal the miracle worker or faith

healer themselves lacked faith rather than the recipient. And this is corroborated by Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:5-6 by extension. As we have seen, in Matthew 17, Jesus disciples were unable to heal a man's son and when Jesus responds to this, he says that those disciples lacked faith and says that if his disciples believed, they could miraculously move mountains. Again, this means that the failure to bring about a miracle lies with the faith of the miracle worker, the healer, not the recipient such as the man or his son in Matthew 17. When charismatic leaders assert that a lack of faith for miracles prevents miracles from occurring, they are necessarily indicting themselves.

At this point, we will turn our attention to Acts 14.

Acts 14:7 And there they preached the gospel. 8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: 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.

The most important phrasing in this passage comes in verse 9, which says that Paul looked at the crippled man and "perceived that he had faith to be healed." Does this mean the crippled man had faith that a healing miracle would occur? Again, if passages like Mark 16 establish that faith in Jesus is a prerequisite for receiving miracles, then there is nothing in this passage that is out of conformity with that pattern. In that larger context, this passage easily and simply would express that this man had become a believer in Christ and that Paul perceived this fact. Here the question might emerge as to how Paul was able to perceive that this man had become a believer in Christ. But this is really not a good reason to reject such an interpretation, especially not in favor of the charismatic interpretation. After all, there is an equally pressing question as to how Paul would have perceived that this man had faith for a miraculous healing. In either case, Paul seems to be able to perceive an intangible quality of belief.

Perhaps better insight into the entire question, as well as how Paul perceived his belief, comes from verse 7 and the first part of verse 9. Verse 7 states that "they preached the gospel" and verse 9 begins by telling us that the crippled man had listened to Paul preaching. This is most likely how Paul perceived this man's belief. No doubt Paul could tell somewhat about whether a person had received his preaching of the Gospel by the look on their face when their eyes met. And while many charismatics today would argue that a "full" preaching of the Gospel requires preaching miracles and healing (and even wealth and prosperity), we should look briefly at how nearby passages in the book of Acts frequently define preaching the Gospel.

In Acts 5:42, the apostles "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ in "the temple, and in every house." In Acts 8:5, Philip goes to Samaria and "preached Christ unto them." In Acts 9:20, Paul "preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." Notice here from Acts 9:20 that Paul's habit of preaching Christ involved proving that Jesus was the Son of God. Acts 9:22 says that Paul

continued in Damascus, “proving that this is the Christ.” In Acts 10:34-44, Peter begins to preach to the house of Cornelius “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth” and the ways that God proved Jesus was anointed “for God was with him.” In Acts 11:17, Peter recounts how Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues because “they believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.” In Acts 16:31, Paul tells the prison keeper to “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Acts 17:2-3 explains that Paul’s “manner” or habit was to “reason out of the scripture” and it goes on to describe Paul saying, “Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.” In Acts 18:5, Paul is in Corinth, “testifying to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” Acts 18:28 says that Paul was again, “publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.” And in Acts 26:22-23, Paul summarizes his preaching in general in the following way: “saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.” Clearly, all of these passages show an emphasis on preaching and proving to people that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah.

All these passages provide consistent contextual support for concluding that Paul was preaching in Lystra according to his same “manner” or habit that we see so frequently everywhere else in Acts. Paul was preaching proofs that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah and that is what the crippled man believed. And when Paul perceived that the crippled man had accepted his preaching and believed that Jesus was the Christ, Paul knew that the man could be healed just as Mark 16 states. Miracles, even healing miracles, would be experienced by those who believed when the apostles preached Jesus. There is nothing in this passage that hints or requires that the crippled man had faith for the miracle itself. Context tells us that what he believed at that moment was simply that Jesus was the Christ.

James 5 is another passage that we can examine on this topic.

James 5:13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. 14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. 16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. 17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

There are three phrases in James 5 that are worth analyzing. First, verse 15 refers to the “prayer of faith” saying, “the prayer of faith shall save the sick.” Second, verse 16 says, “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Third, in verse 16 the words “effectual fervent” are translated from the Greek word “energeo” (1754), which means “to be operative” or “put forth power.” And

third, verse 17 says that Elijah was “a man subject” just “as we are” but when he “prayed earnestly,” what he prayed for came to pass.

There are several things to note about these verses.

First, to be precise, verses 15 and 16 say that it is the prayer that is able to heal the sick and accomplish much. Technically speaking, neither passage says that the “faith” heals or accomplishes. “Faith” is not identified as the means or agent of causation. The prayer is.

Second, verse 15 certainly describes the prayer as a “prayer of faith,” but given passages like Mark 16, there is no reason not to think of this as a short-hand identification for prayer made by those who believe in Jesus and his teaching. In fact, James’ words here are reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching in John 15:7, in which Jesus explains, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” In both James 5:15-16 and John 15:7, we have the idea of belief coupled with prayer or petitioning God in a statement about ensuring the effectiveness of prayer. As we have seen, the use of “energeo” in James 5:17 essentially denotes effectiveness and is applied to the word “prayer,” which demonstrates that this is a teaching about how our prayers can be effective. Since John 15 is explicit that the belief refers to belief in Jesus and his teachings, we are on solid ground to conclude that James is likewise affirming that faith in Jesus is a requirement for God to answer our requests. Likewise, we find further confirmation in the fact that verse 16 identifies effective prayer as prayer that comes from a man in righteous standing before God. Since righteousness before God is so strongly tied in the New Testament to belief in Jesus Christ, this phrasing also corroborates that the “faith” in James 5 is belief in Jesus and his teachings, just as in Mark 16, not faith in the miracle or for the miracle specifically.

Third, the word “earnestly” is the Greek word “proseuche” (4335), which means, “prayer addressed to God” or “a place set apart or suited to the offering of prayer.” More generally, this word is translated simply as “prayer” without any qualification or characterization often throughout the New Testament. The English word “earnestly” seems to directly refer to something about the attitude of the person offering the prayer. On this basis, charismatics may argue that this verse describes our attitude in the sense of how much we believe what we’re asking for. However, as we can see, the Greek word either just refers to prayer itself or reflects more specifically that the prayer is addressed to God. Once again, we see that there is nothing in this language that requires or suggests the idea that our faith for a miracle is powerful and effective to produce a miracle. Instead, James 5 is simply saying that if Christians want their prayers to be effective, the prayer must be addressed to the true God by someone who believes in Jesus Christ and his teaching.

Next, we will turn our attention to Matthew 15:21-28. Here we have placed the NIV translation below the King James Version for comparison.

(KJV)

Matthew 15: 22 And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. 23 But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. 24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 25 Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. 26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. 27 And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. 28 Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.

(NIV)

Matthew 15:21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." 23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." 24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." 25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. 26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." 27 "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." 28 Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

The central phrasing that charismatics might point out comes in verse 28 in which Jesus says to the Canaanite woman, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." It is significant that Jesus doesn't say, "as you believed." Even in the King James Version, this verse really only depicts Jesus expressing that this woman's daughter will be healed, "as she wills." The fact that she wills or wants her daughter to be healed is compatible with either faith that Jesus is the Messiah or faith that a miracle will occur. Consequently, this particular detail isn't really proof for either view. However, there are two pieces of evidence that are informative. First, the woman begins the conversation by calling Jesus, "Lord, Son of David." This is clearly a public declaration that she believes him to be the Messiah. So, contextually, we already know that this woman is expressing belief that Jesus is the Christ, which gives us a sound basis for concluding that the faith mentioned in verse 28 is also simply faith that Jesus is the Christ, rather than faith for or in a miracle. Second, in verses 25-26 this woman is persistent in declaring her submission and recognition of Jesus authority as the Messiah. She expresses her insistence that although he is the Jewish Messiah, nevertheless he is also master over the Gentiles as well. From start to finish her belief in this passage is a matter of undaunted certainty that Jesus has the authority to heal her daughter. And, as the NIV conveys, Jesus response in verse 28 can also be translated as "Your request is granted." In other words, his response follows the same theme as her request. Her requests were petitions focused on his authority. And his response is an affirmation of the authority she believes he has. Ultimately, the

power to bring about a miracle is depicted here as solely residing in Jesus will to grant or not grant her request. It is not a matter of how much faith she has for a miracle.

Moreover, this incident in Matthew 15 is very similar to the next passage in Matthew 8, which also involves Jesus encounter with a Gentile who expresses profound faith that Jesus has authority to heal the sick.

Matthew 8:1 When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. 2 And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. 3 And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. 4 And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. 5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, 6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. 7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. 8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. 9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. 10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. 11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.

In this later portion of this passage, a Roman centurion petitions Jesus to heal his servant. In verse 13, Jesus tells the centurion, “Go thy way, and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.” For a charismatic, Jesus is saying, “the thing that you believed would happen will now be done for you.” For a non-charismatic, Jesus is saying “because you believed in me, what you have asked for will be done.” Of course, the text does not say “believed in me,” nor does it say “the thing that you believed for.” It simply says, “as you believed.” The Greek word for “as” is “hos” (5613) which means “as, like, even as.”

First, if this word is translated as “like” it could convey similarity between the thing that was believed and the thing that occurred. In this sense, it might lend some support to the charismatic view. But not necessarily. After all, the centurion does explain exactly what he believes in verses 8-9. In verse 7, Jesus offered to come and visit the servant to heal him in person. But the centurion says that it was not necessary for Jesus to actually visit in person because, as he understood and believed, Jesus had authority to tell subordinates to “go do this” or “go do that,” and consequently, Jesus could give orders from a distance for the servant to be healed and Jesus’ subordinates (presumably angels) would carry out his orders

without him having to take one single step. Immediately after this explanation from the centurion comes Jesus' remark that he had "not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." In short, Jesus considers the centurion's concept about how Jesus could order subordinates to do his bidding to be an expression of his faith in who Jesus was, in Jesus' authority as the Messiah. In this context, for Jesus to say something like "let it be done for you exactly like you have believed" only conveys that the centurion was correct about Jesus' authority and Jesus was now going to exercise that authority just as the centurion thought that he could. Thus, verse 13 denotes that "his servant was healed in the selfsame hour," showing that Jesus did indeed have authority to heal the servant without even visiting him or laying hands on him. In this scenario, this passage doesn't teach that the man's faith caused the miracle or that the faith itself had the power to produce a miracle. To the contrary, in this scenario Matthew 8 teaches that the centurion recognized Jesus' complete authority over spiritual beings, including angels, and could command them to do his bidding. And Jesus' rewarded that correct belief by proving that the centurion was exactly right. Once again, the passage isn't teaching that we must have faith for a miracle in order to experience a miracle, it is teaching that we must have faith in Jesus as a prerequisite for experiencing a miracle.

Second, there are other possibilities for the meaning of Matthew 8. The Greek word "hos" can also mean "as" in the sense of time. For instance, in English we might say something like, "as soon as you called, I picked up the phone" or "as I was jogging, I realized I forgot my keys." In fact, "hos" is translated as "when" 42 times in the New Testament. There are some great examples of this in Acts 5:24, 7:23, 10:7, 13:29, 14:5, etc. Since the very next phrase in Matthew 8:13 says, "And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour," it is also quite likely that the phrase "as thou believed," is intended to denote the time when the servant was healed. The centurion's request was granted and his servant was healed as he professed his belief in Jesus. This meaning would even further prohibit the charismatic interpretation of the verse.

Third, it is also plausible that "as" here conveys the idea of "because" or expressing causality. We find this usage at times on occasions where "hos" is translated as "when." For instance, Acts 17:13 says, "But when (hos) the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people." Clearly, this verse is not merely conveying that the Jews of Thessalonica just happened to come to Berea at a time that coincided with when Paul was preaching there. Rather, the report that Paul was preaching in Berea causes these Jews from Thessalonica to travel to Berea and stir up trouble. Here, "hos" is not just conveying a chronological relationship, but a causal relationship. Consequently, "hos" may simply convey a causal relationship in Matthew 8:13. In other words, Jesus could very well be saying to the centurion, "because you believed, so be it done unto you." To identify exactly what the centurion believed, we need only look at the surrounding passage which is filled with the centurion's explicit declarations that Jesus had authority to give commands and to heal the sick.

Ultimately, both context and vocabulary once again demonstrate that the charismatic interpretation is superfluous to the text. It is not only contextually very natural to interpret the “faith” of the centurion as a recognition of Jesus’ authority as the Messiah, but this is consistent with what we have repeatedly seen elsewhere in the New Testament, including Mark 16. Belief that Jesus is the Messiah is a prerequisite to experiencing miracles and everywhere we find a discussion of the relationship between faith and miracles, the context immediately identifies that faith as faith that Jesus is the Christ. There seems little warrant for charismatics to demand that these passages are talking about faith in a miracle or faith for specific miracle to occur.

Next, we should consider Jesus’ words in Mark 9.

Mark 9:21 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. **22** And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. **23** Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth.

This story has an immediately apparent stark contrast with the Roman centurion in Matthew 8. The Roman centurion was so certain that Jesus had the authority to heal his servant that he insisted Jesus could cause the healing even from a great distance away just by giving an order for the servant to be healed. Jesus immediately commends him for such strong faith and grants the centurion’s request specifically because of the amazing faith he had in Jesus’ authority. Compare that to this father in Mark 9. In verse 23, Jesus responds to this man by saying, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” For the charismatic, this may seem like Jesus is suggesting that the man lacks faith for a miracle and that any supernatural event is possible if we have enough faith for that event. However, we can see from the previous verse that this man’s lack of faith was a lack of faith in Jesus’ very ability to do a miracle. While the centurion was so sure Jesus’ had authority that he knew Jesus could simply give a command to heal his servant, this man petitions Jesus by saying, “if you can do anything, help us.” This man isn’t even convinced Jesus will be able to help. This is a fundamentally a lack of faith in who Jesus is and how much authority Jesus’ has. So, when Jesus responds by saying, “if you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes,” he isn’t telling the man to believe for the miracle. Jesus is telling the man to believe in him, to believe that he has the power and authority to do this miracle. What follows is simply a reiteration of the same principle that we see articulated by Jesus later in Mark 16 where he specifically says that miracles will follow those who believe in him and his teachings. In short, the immediate context of the preceding verse, the larger context of Mark’s Gospel as a whole including chapter 16, and a comparative analysis to Matthew 8 reveal that once again this passage is simply teaching that belief in Jesus is requirement to receiving miracles.

There are two other passages that we want to cover in this survey, starting with Hebrews 11.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Here the phrase “faith is the substance of things hoped for” becomes the charismatic ideal declaration of their doctrine. For the charismatic (particularly those of the faith movement), it is as though faith is a substance that actually comes together to form the miracle we are believing for. However, it is clear that in the context of Hebrews 11, faith is once again simply belief in God and his teachings. Faith is not a force or a substance that comes from us and causes events to take shape and occur in the world around us. We know this because of what the rest of Hebrews 11 goes on to say.

First, the entire chapter is about faith and about the things that people are motivated to do because they believe in God and His word. Certainly some of the actions listed are supernatural, but not all of them. Some of these actions are quite natural. In verse 7, Noah builds the ark because he believes God’s warning that the Flood will come. There is nothing necessarily miraculous about building a large ship. Today mankind builds massive ships, even aircraft carriers and cruise ships, all by natural means. While Noah’s ship wasn’t built using today’s technology, given enough time as well as sufficient labor and supplies, the ark was a perfectly buildable undertaking. And nowhere in scripture is the ark depicted as coming into existence by means of a miracle. Rather it is built by human hands through human labor. And it took a lot of labor, which is the point Hebrews is making here. Why else would a man undertake such a massive task as building the ark unless he truly believed in God and what God has said? Likewise, verse 8 describes that Abraham obeyed God and traveled to the Promised Land. But traveling isn’t supernatural or miraculous. This isn’t like Philip in Acts 8:39-40 whom God picked up with his Spirit and transported to Azotus near Caesarea. Abraham walked or rode animals to make this journey. In addition, Hebrews 11:17-18 describes how by faith Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice. This act certainly isn’t supernatural or miraculous in nature. Abraham and Isaac walk up the mountain. Abraham ties Isaac up. All of this is perfectly natural in character. Moreover, Abraham doesn’t hope to sacrifice Isaac. And Isaac isn’t actually sacrificed. So, it is difficult to see how the charismatic interpretation of Hebrews 11:1 could even remotely apply here. Furthermore, Hebrews 11:22 says that “Joseph, when he died...gave commandment concerning his bones.” Clearly, Joseph’s death is not a miracle. Neither is giving commands concerning what your family should do with your bones a miracle. Lastly, Hebrews 11:36-37 says that by faith, “others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.” None of these saints were hoping for such hardships and none of these hardships were brought about by these saints hoping and believing for such terrible experiences.

While we could continue, it is easy to see that there are many works of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 that are completely contrary to the charismatic idea that

faith is a substance of sorts that causes the occurrence of specific things we hope and believe for. On the other hand, all of the examples in Hebrews 11 perfectly fit the interpretation that faith is once again about belief in God and his word that motivates people to do extraordinary (but often entirely non-miraculous) things or to endure very difficult things.

Second, Hebrews 11 is very clear about whether or not faith produces the things we hope for. Verse 13 asserts that, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Verse 39 restates this, saying that, “All these, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.” The faith described in Hebrews 11 is clearly not producing or bringing about our hopes. Rather, Hebrews 11 is talking about faith as belief in future things pertaining to God and the promises He has spoken concerning the His coming kingdom and the reward of the saints. And in Hebrews, this faith motivates men to act and to endure. But the faith in Hebrews 11 is simply incompatible with the charismatic notion that faith for a miracle causes a miracle to occur.

The last set of passages that we will cover in this survey is actually a pair of parallel accounts recorded in both Matthew 13 and Mark 6.

Matthew 13:54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? 55 Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? 57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. 58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

Mark 6:1 And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. 2 And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. 4 But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. 5 And he could (3756) (1410) there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.

The critical phrasing occurs in verse 15 of Matthew’s account and verse 5 of Mark’s account. Matthew 13:58 reads, “And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” On its own, Matthew’s version lends itself to the idea that Jesus may have simply chose not to do miracles. Only Mark’s version hints at an ability or inability for miracles based on the presence or lack of faith. Mark 6:5 more explicitly reads, “And he could there do no might work, save that he laid his

hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.” However, Mark’s version does not specify why Jesus “could not” do any mighty works. It doesn’t mention faith or unbelief at all. Consequently, one thing is clear right away. Neither passage functions as a sufficient proof text on its own for the charismatic position. We have to assemble elements from both accounts to arrive at the idea that Jesus could not do miracles in this location because of the people’s unbelief. Still, what are we to derive from such information?

We would like to begin answering this question by once again reviewing Jesus’ teachings concerning miracles as he sent his apostles out to preach at the Great Commission.

Mark 16:15 And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. 17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

First, as we have stated earlier, in Mark 16 Jesus clearly creates a discriminating distinction between those who believe in him and his teachings and those who do not. Those who believe will receive miracles. Those who do not believe will not receive miracles. We should not be surprised to see Jesus himself operating by this same discriminating protocol throughout his ministry in the Gospel accounts. As we have seen throughout this study, before performing a miracle he at times even paused or challenged the person asking for the miracle in order to specifically make sure they believed he was the Christ. As we saw from Matthew 9, when two blind men confessed Jesus as the Christ, the Son of David, and asked to be healed, Jesus pressed them further saying, “Believe ye that I am able to do this?” And as we saw in Matthew 8, Jesus was impressed and moved to act because of how much power and authority the Roman centurion believed that he had. Since we have already seen the New Testament establish that Jesus required that people truly believe he was the Christ before he performed a miracle for them, it would not be surprising that unbelief would be something that prevented Jesus from choosing to perform a miracle for people like we see here in Matthew 13 and Mark 6. This doesn’t imply that faith fuels miracles or that belief in the miracle itself is necessary. It conforms perfectly to the rest of the New Testament in which belief that Jesus is the Messiah was a qualifier that Jesus generally required before performing miracles for people.

Second, when we look at the context of Matthew 13 and Mark 6, we see that the people are specifically in disbelief about who Jesus is. The passages are replete with information emphasizing that these people insisted that Jesus was just an ordinary man, raised in their neighborhood, from a common family with whom they were well familiar. In other words, these texts are not vague in this regard. There is no hint here that the problem is a lack of belief for miracles. Rather, these passages spell out clearly that the problem was a lack of belief that Jesus was the Christ.

Third, because Mark 6:5 is phrased in terms of what Jesus “could not” do, charismatics might want to infer that Jesus was utterly incapable as if something was now lacking in Jesus, as if their doubt somehow deprived him of his ability or power to perform miracles. The Greek word used in Mark 6:5 is “dunamai” (1410), which is defined as, “to be able, have power whether by virtue of one’s own ability and resources, or of a state of mind, or through favourable circumstances, or by permission of law or custom.” The last few phrases are important because they show that a lack of “dunamai” doesn’t necessarily mean a lack of personal ability. The limitation can also stem from a lack of favorable circumstances or lack of permission or something being contrary to custom. We have already seen that Jesus had a custom of only performing miracles for people who believed he was the Christ. However, we can gain additional insight by briefly examining a few other passages where this word “dunamai” occurs.

Matthew 22:46 And no man was able (1410) to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

Matthew 22 describes how no man is able to answer Jesus. Of course, it doesn’t mean that they had suddenly lost the ability to speak, as if their lips and tongues stopped functioning. It means that the circumstances were not conducive to responding. Jesus had just asked a very challenging question. Surely, as far as capacity goes someone could have spoken up. But they would have looked foolish or ignorant, so they kept quiet. This is a great example when the specific circumstances cause the limitation, not a lack of ability.

Mark 1:45 But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could (1410) no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

Mark 1 says that Jesus could no longer openly enter into the city because news about him had spread. Does this mean that Jesus’ legs stopped working as he approached the city or that he ceased being able to move so that he could not pass through the gates, over the walls, or through the windows? Of course not. This was not a lack of personal capacity or power to act. The problem here was that circumstances were not favorable for Jesus to enter the city unnoticed now that he had become famous.

Luke 11:7 And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot (1410) rise and give thee.

Luke 11 recounts a metaphor in which Jesus asks his followers if they would turn away a friend who asks them for help. The friend refuses to help because the door was shut and everyone is in bed. Was the man suddenly incapable of getting up? Was the door suddenly immovable? Of course not. The point is that certain according to cultural norms it was considered the wrong time to do such things. Likewise, the limitation in Mark 6 was that it was not the right time for miracles

given the fact that these people did not meet his general requirement of believing he was the Christ.

Luke 14:20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot (1410) come.

In the parable in Luke 14, people are invited to a feast. In verse 20, a man responds that he cannot come because he has just been married. Does Jesus mean that this man was physically incapable of going to the feast? Of course not. The point is that the timing was not right. The circumstances were prohibitive.

Lastly, we might consider another occurrence of “dunamai” later in the very same chapter of Mark 6.

Mark 6:19 Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could (1410) not: 20 For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. 21 And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; 22 And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. 23 And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. 24 And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. 25 And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. 26 And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. 27 And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother.

Notice that verse 19 describes how Herod's wife wanted to kill John the Baptist but she “could not.” The Greek word for “could” here is “dunamai” just like verse 5 from earlier in this same chapter of Mark. So, what does Mark 6 mean when it says that Herodias “could not” have John the Baptist killed? Is she physically incapable of saying or acting to try and bring about John's death? Of course not. In fact, we can see that the entire narrative is about her efforts to have John executed. Moreover, as verses 27-28 record, she was ultimately successful. In other words, eventually she was able to have John killed. Clearly, “dunamai” here does not speak of Herodias' personal abilities. It simply conveys that the circumstances were not right for her to do something that she was always willing and physically able to do. The obstacle is that King Herod outranks her and he is initially opposed to executing John the Baptist. On this note, we can consider Jesus' words in John 5:19-20 where he says that he only does miracles as the Father directs him to do. Since we have seen a pattern in passages like Mark 16 articulated by Jesus himself that belief in the Christ is a requirement for receiving miracles, we can assume that such a principle was not Jesus' own invention.

Rather, this general rule must have been at the direction of the Father Himself. Consequently, like Herod's wife in Mark 6, we can understand that Jesus could not perform many miracles in Mark 6, not because he lacked power or because people lacked faith for miracles, but because the Father had set forth a protocol that belief in the Christ was a requirement for receiving miracles. Therefore, in a town where most people did not believe Jesus was the Christ, Jesus would have been prevented by the direction of the Father from exercising his power to do miracles. Once again, there is nothing in the language of Mark 6:5 which would warrant the charismatic conclusion that faith for a miracle is necessary in order to produce a miracle.

Now that we have completed our survey of the typical variety of passages that charismatics cite to support their claims about faith and miracles, we should add one final scriptural consideration to our study. For this purpose, we now turn our attention to the Apostle Paul. In Galatians 4:13-15, Paul mentions a problem that he suffered with his eyes and he refers to it as an "infirmity."

Galatians 4:13 Ye know how through infirmity (769) of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. 14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

The Greek word for "infirmity" in Galatians 4:13 is "astheneia" (769), which means, "want of strength, weakness, infirmity." This is the same word used in Luke 5:15, which says that "great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities." It is used in Luke 13:11 to refer to the woman who had been stricken with the issue of blood for eighteen years. It is used in John 11:4 to refer to the sickness that caused Lazarus to die. And it is used in Acts 28:9 to refer to those who "had diseased in the island" of Melita who came to Paul and "were healed." More importantly, Paul uses this same word "astheneia" in 1 Corinthians 11:30 to refer to his "infirmities" that resulted from persecutions and trials in verses 24-27, including being whipped, beaten, and stoned. (Paul's stoning is also recorded in Acts 14:19.) And Paul uses this same word again in verses 5 and 9 of the very next chapter of 2 Corinthians, when he says, "yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities (769)." He then goes on to describe these infirmities further, using "astheneia" several more times in the next few verses.

2 Corinthians 12:8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness (769). Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities (769), that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities (769), in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

So, here is Paul using a word that elsewhere refers to physical maladies that required healing and Paul is using that word to describe a physical problem that Galatians 4 suggests had to do with Paul's eyes. Yet regardless of whether it pertained to Paul's eyes specifically or not, 2 Corinthians 12 is very clear that Paul had asked God three times to remove this infirmity from him. But God would not. Here we must ask some obvious questions. Does Paul lack faith? Does Paul lack sufficient belief for miracles? Paul had performed countless healings by his own hands and numerous other miracles. Of course Paul didn't lack the faith for miracles. Lack of faith wasn't the problem. In this case, miraculous healing did not occur simply because God had a specific reason not to do the miracle. And that is the larger lesson here. Paul's infirmities prove we cannot insist that the lack of a miracle is caused by a lack of sufficient faith for a miracle.

New Testament passages like John 15 and Mark 16 and others lay down conditions for miracles. And those conditions begin with belief that Jesus is the Christ and belief in his teachings. These things are general prerequisites that God has appointed. They don't restrict God from doing miracles when he desires even when these requirements aren't met. But they do generally restrict men from receiving miracles unless these conditions are met. In that sense they are basic instructions to men on what we need to do if we want to receive from God. But these conditions are also only the starting point. Like the case of Paul's infirmity, there may be times and circumstances when God does not desire to do miracles for particular reasons.

The conclusions for this study are twofold. First, we have examined the New Testament and found that there is no support for the charismatic doctrine that one must have faith for a miracle in order to experience a miracle, or conversely that a lack of miracles is caused by a lack of sufficient faith for miracles. Second, we have shown that God has established general conditions or requirements for working miracles among his people. We see these conditions in the ministry of Jesus and these conditions are taught specifically by Jesus in passages like John 15 and Mark 16.

In closing, we'd like to make a few other comments on the logical relationships to these arguments. We have shown that phrases like "according to your faith be it unto you" actually refer to faith that Jesus is the Christ rather than faith for a particular miracle. At this point, a shrewd charismatic might argue, "Of course. We aren't excluding faith in Christ. We are saying that a person must believe in Christ and they must believe for a miracle." This kind of argument asserts that there are really two conditions for miracles: 1) belief in Christ and 2) belief for the specific miracle. But having seen how the context of each of the relevant scriptures clearly refers to faith that Jesus is the Christ, we must ask ourselves an important question. What evidence is there demanding that the faith mentioned in these passages also refers to faith for the miracles themselves? In other words, since the evidence has been established that the faith mentioned in these passages refers to faith in Jesus, the idea of faith for the miracles is shown to be unnecessary. You can read, explain, and understand everything in these passages solely in terms of faith in Jesus Christ, as we have seen. Consequently, the

charismatic idea that these passages talk about faith for miracles is entirely superfluous to these scriptures. Instead, it is shown to be an idea superimposed upon the texts that is not exegetically demanded or substantiated by the texts themselves.

(For more information on the conditional nature of the charismatic gifts, please see the other articles in our Charismatic and Pentecostalism section, including our two-part article “What Happened to the Gifts: Scriptural Indications” and our PDF article titled, “The Old Testament and Conditional Gifts.”)

Addendum –

The Timelines of Matthew and John 6

Matthew 14-17 and John 6 both record the two of the same events. In Matthew 14:13-21, Matthew records how Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fishes, fed 5,000 men, and 12 baskets were gathered full of leftovers. John 6:5-13 also describes how Jesus multiplied five loaves and two fishes, fed 5,000 men, and 12 baskets were gathered full of leftovers. Clearly, these are the same event. Likewise, in both Gospels, the multiplication of loaves and fishes is followed a short textual distance later by Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ. We find Peter’s confession in Matthew 16:13-19, just two chapters after the multiplication of loaves and fishes. In John’s Gospel, Peter’s confession occurs in chapter 6:68-69, the end of the very same chapter that earlier records the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Of course, these similarities are not accidental. Nor are these two separate confessions of Christ by Peter. What is happening here is what often happens in the Gospels. We have different accounts giving different levels of detail for the same event or series of events, in this case the multiplication of loaves and fishes and Peter’s confession. And the truly interesting thing is that by comparing the Gospel’s in this way, we can actually fill in narrative information that isn’t presented in the other account.

However, even though it is impossible to distinguish the multiplication of loaves and fishes or Peter’s confession in Matthew from those in John, there are a few details that need to be reconciled. In particular, Matthew’s account notes that Jesus and his disciples arrive in Capernaum in chapter 17:24, after the multiplication of loaves and fishes and, more importantly, after Peter’s confession in chapter 16. John 6:17-25, on the other hand, state that Jesus and the apostles were already in Capernaum prior to Peter’s confession, which is confirmed directly in verse 59 of the same chapter. So, which is it? Is one of the gospels wrong and the other right? Are these actually two different occasions when Peter confesses Jesus?

To answer these questions it is important to track the movements of Jesus and his disciples around this time as recorded in all four Gospels. In chapter 3:1 and 13, Matthew recounts that Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan in the wilderness of Judaea. In Matthew 4:12, Jesus departs for Galilee

after John is cast into prison. According chapter 4:13, Jesus leaves Nazareth at this time and begins to dwell in Capernaum. Verse 23 of chapter 4 goes on to recount that Jesus travels around Galilee at this time, teaching in the synagogues. Chapter 5 begins by describing how Jesus goes up a mountain and begins to preach. What follows in chapters 5, 6, and 7 is a record of Jesus' preaching. Then chapter 8:1 concludes that Jesus came down from the mountain where he had been preaching and verse 5 denotes, "Jesus was entered into Capernaum." In Matthew 8:28, Jesus and his disciples are in country of Gergesenes (also known as Gadarenes), which is southeast of the Sea of Galilee. In chapter 9:1, Jesus and his disciples get into a ship, cross of the Sea of Galilee, and come to his home town, which at this point is Capernaum according to chapter 4:13. (It could also mean Nazareth, Jesus' original home town, which was in the region to the southwest of the Sea of Galilee.) Verse 27 denotes that Jesus departs from Capernaum. Verse 31 uses the same phrase indicating that Jesus departs but does not identify the location he is leaving by name. In Matthew 11:21, Jesus condemns the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida. Both of these cities are today thought to be located along the northern rim of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus feeds the 5,000 in Matthew 14:15-21. Then Matthew 15:21-22 reports that Jesus and his apostles are in the region or vicinity of Tyre and Sidon. These cities are farther north along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, although the text only necessitates that Jesus was in the region of the cities, not the cities themselves. Then Matthew 15:29 states that Jesus and his disciples travel along the Sea of Galilee. Verses 29-38 describe a second occasion on which Jesus multiplies food only this time Jesus feeds 4,000 men. Then verse 39 states that Jesus and his disciples are in the vicinity of the city of Magadan, also known as Magdala, which is on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. Chapter 16:5 says that Jesus and his disciples cross the lake, meaning the Sea of Galilee. Verse 13 of chapter 16 says that they are in the region of Caesaria Philippi. The city of Caesaria Philippi is about as far north above the Sea of Galilee as the city of Tyre. But like the city of Tyre, the text does not indicate that Jesus and his disciples went to the city, only that they were in the general region of this prominent city. Essentially it is saying that they went from the west side of the Sea of Galilee back to the north side of the Sea and a little beyond. This is the last location description prior to Peter's confession in Matthew 16:16. Then chapter 17:1 begins the account of the transfiguration, which occurs on a nearby mountain although no location is identified for the region in Matthew's gospel. Chapter 17:22 states that Jesus and his disciples "abode in Galilee" and finally, chapter 17:24 records that they "were come to Capernaum."

There are four obvious facts about Matthew's account. First, Jesus and his disciples are spending their time in northern Palestine, in the larger general region around the Sea of Galilee. Second, Matthew's account is fairly detailed and lengthy. In John's Gospel, Jesus leaves Judaea for Galilee in chapter 4:3, passing through Samaria along the way. And although John 5:1 states that Jesus began to head toward Jerusalem, the rest of chapter 6 still takes place in (or near) Capernaum which is on the shore of Galilee. So, in John we have 3 chapters that describe the travels of Jesus and his disciples after they initially leave Judaea for Galilee in chapter 4. Matthew denotes Jesus' exit from Judaea to chronicle his

movements and activities in the general region of Galilee as early as chapter 4:12. And as late as Matthew 17:24, nearly 14 chapters later, Matthew is still chronicling Jesus' travels through this northern region around and beyond the Sea of Galilee. Third, Jesus and his disciples are doing a lot of traveling around in this area at this time. When we first find them, they are already up by Chorazin and Bethsaida along the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee. They then travel farther northeast nearer to Tyre, then back to the Sea of Galilee's coasts, then they cross the lake in a boat to Magadan (or Magdala) on the west coast of the Sea of Galilee, then they go back farther north to the region around Caesaria Philippi much farther east than Tyre, and finally they travel back down south to Galilee and Capernaum, which is between Chorazin and Magadan on the northwest rim of the Sea of Galilee. And fourth, if we drew all these travels as lines on a map we would see that Jesus and his disciples would likely crisscross their previous paths at a couple points at the very least. This is probably even more likely once we consider that many of these references are not to specific places but to general regions, which indicates that Jesus and his disciples were moving around in a larger area quite a bit rather than spending longer time in a few isolated locations. These details are critical for understanding how Matthew's account reconciles with John.

Several other facts are worth noting to help answer our question. First, as noted earlier in Matthew 4:13, Jesus moves to Capernaum, which becomes his home town shortly after he leaves Judaea. Second, chapter 9 denotes at least one other occasion in which Jesus returns to Nazareth before again departing to travel and preach. Third, although Mark 9:33 agrees with Matthew and places Jesus and his disciples in Capernaum after Peter's confession, Luke 7:1 agrees with John's chronology and places Jesus and his disciples in Capernaum not long before Peter's confession in Luke 9:18-20. What should be obvious at this point is that Jesus and his disciples were in Capernaum more than once during this extensive traveling in the greater northern region around the Sea of Galilee. And this isn't surprising given the assertion in Matthew 4:13 that Jesus dwelled in Capernaum. Consequently, there is no discrepancy between Matthew's placement of Jesus and his disciples in Capernaum after Peter's confession and John's placement of Jesus and his disciples in Capernaum before Peter's confession. Both are true. John's account is obviously protracted. And ultimately, Jesus and his disciples were in Capernaum both before and after Peter's confession, traveling back and forth and throughout the region at that time and crisscrossing their own steps as Matthew takes great lengths to record.