

The Things That Mark an Apostle Paul's Signs, Wonders, and Miracles

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ABSTRACT: The Acts of the Apostles describes – sometimes in rather colorful details – signs and wonders wrought by the apostle Paul. Can this portrait of the apostle be corroborated based on his own letters? Or do we have to conclude that contemporaries of the apostle paint a more or less hagiographic picture of Paul's miraculous activities? What is the place of miracles surrounding Paul and wrought by him within the whole of his life and mission? A survey of Paul's letters allows us to get a view of how the apostle sees the function of signs, wonders, and mighty works within the dynamics of the proclamation of the gospel. Viewed in this way, the possible difference between information based upon Paul's own communication and that of his contemporaries about him appears to decrease. A clearer picture of the part miracles play within the whole of Paul's mission may also help to rethink modern and post-modern worldviews from a biblical perspective.

KEYWORDS: apostle Paul, Acts of the Apostles, Pauline letters, miracles, signs and wonders, worldview, deism

1. Paul: Theologian or Wonderworker?

The apostle Paul is usually more associated with theological reasoning than with signs, wonders, and mighty works;¹ those were especially the hallmark of Jesus's presence among Israel. However, in the Acts of the Apostles, we do find signs, wonders, and mighty works attributed to Paul. Moreover, Acts mentions these miracles not only in passing and in general, but in several cases in a rather elaborated way. Yet can this picture of the apostle be corroborated from his own letters? Paul himself seems to be reticent to ask much attention for this aspect of his ministry. Does this mean that the Book of Acts presents us with an exaggerated

¹ As already noted by Origen in his explanation of 1 Cor 12:4-10 that Paul "regarded 'the word' as higher than miraculous powers, he for that reason places 'workings of miracles' and 'gifts of healings' in a lower place than the gifts of the word," *Contra Celsum* 3.46 (ANF IV, 838). Also quoted by Graham H. Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous. A Historical Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2013) 4. Anyway, the fact that Origen attempts to explain the difference, shows that, for him, miracles are not a neglected category.

image of this side of Paul's activities? Or do we have to conclude that the narratives about miracles going hand in hand with Paul's ministry are simply a mild form of *pia fraus* within the genre of hagiographic literature?

As to Paul's working of miracles, it is well-known among biblical scholars that there appears to be a difference between the Paul according to the portrait of Luke in Acts and the Paul we get to know based on his own letters.² However, this difference may be smaller than usually stated. It may originate from Paul's modesty. From one of his extant letters to the Christian congregation in Corinth, we know how he would rather boast in his weakness,³ as turns out from his ironical reversal of the prize known as the *corona muralis* that was awarded to a soldier who first managed to scale the wall during an assault of a beleaguered city. He depicts himself not as a victorious hero-apostle, but, on the contrary, a fleeing one, who is let down over the wall of Damascus in a basket.⁴ This is a rather humorous self-mockery in the contrast between the apostle lowered in a basket to flee from king Aretas and the anonymous apostle taken up into the heavenly Paradise to hear "ἄρρητα ῥήματα" 'unspeakable words.'⁵ Moreover, it hardly needs mention that Paul's written correspondence appears not to aim at giving an autobiography or chronicle of the author's life, but consists of occasional letters addressing concrete concerns of people and communities in contingent situations.⁶

It may be, therefore, that the question whether Paul is foremost a thinker or a wonder-worker presents us with a false dilemma. It is far more probable that

2 This portrait may have tiny differences depending on one's stance as to the authorship of some of the epistles canonically ascribed to Paul. In this study, I make no difference between letters considered to be genuine Pauline and the so called post-Pauline or Pseudo-Pauline letters, partly also because the scholarly 'consensus' did not always succeed in convincing me of its 'assured' results. Nevertheless, if some of the canonical Pauline letters would have been written by later generation anonymous disciples or co-workers of Paul, we logically would expect even more elaborated descriptions of miracles wrought by Paul. Such descriptions, by their very nature, would easily give away their hagiographic intent. However, we do not find such elaborate descriptions of Paul's miracles in the possibly pseudepigraphic letters, which means that such a distinction might at least *strengthen* the opinion that there is no significant difference between the portrait of Paul that can be reconstructed based on his own writings and based on how contemporaries saw him!

3 Yet, "how can Paul write that he is a man of weakness, yet at the same time claim or be credited with works of power?" Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 7.

4 2 Cor 11:30-32. See N.T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2015) 236–237. This may explain Paul's assertion that "he is not lying" in 2 Cor 11:31, because the *corona muralis* could be claimed by the first soldier reaching the top of a city-wall during a siege. However, such a claim had to be confirmed by an oath, something that seems logical, because in a tumultuous situation of a siege it was difficult to decide who reached the top first, and at the same time it was rather easy to make a false claim.

5 2 Cor 12:1-4. Note the wordplay on the name of Aretas, 2 Cor 11:32, and the "ἄρρητα ῥήματα," 'unspeakable words,' 2 Cor 12:4!

6 Cf. S. Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter. Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Apostelgeschichte und den authentischen Paulusbriefen* (BZNW; Berlin: De Gruyter 1996) 271.

Paul himself would have seen his thinking and travels, his praying and preaching, his writings and readiness to suffer, and also his signs and wonders as all part of his one mission.⁷ To clarify this picture, we will first turn to how the Book of Acts depicts the presence of the miraculous around Paul, and then proceed to what his letters allow us to see of the miraculous. A clearer picture of the part miracles play within Paul's mission may help us to rethink modern and post-modern worldviews from a biblical perspective.

2. Paul's Signs, Wonders, and Mighty Works According to the Acts of the Apostles

Referring a bit vaguely to “the presence of the miraculous around Paul” rather than firmly to “Paul's miracles” is a deliberate choice here. For both in the Acts and in Paul's letters we do not only find signs and wonders worked *by* Paul, but also unusual events happening *to* him. Usually scholars only concentrate on the question whether Paul-as-gleaned-from-his-letters is in a similar way a wonder-worker as he appears to be based on the Acts of the Apostles. When we take into account the question of Paul and what we use to call “the miraculous” in a broader sense, the gap between Acts and Paul's letters may become even narrower. Firstly, I will turn to miracles accomplished by Paul, and secondly focus on miracles happening to him according to the Book of Acts.

Paul and Miracles in the Book of Acts	
Miracles accomplished by Paul	Miracles happening to Paul
Acts 13:11 (blinding the sorcerer Elymas)	Acts 9:3-6 (encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus)
Acts 14:3 (signs and wonders)	Acts 14:19-20 (Paul surviving stoning)
Acts 14:8-10 (healing of a cripple in Lystra)	Acts 16:9-10 (vision)
Acts 15:12 (signs and wonders)	Acts 16:25-26 (earthquake in Philippi)
Acts 16:16-18 (exorcism of the psychic slave girl)	Acts 18:9-10 (vision in Corinth)
Acts 19:6 (glossolalia and prophesying after laying on of hands)	Acts 20:23 (vision)

⁷ Cf. Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 6: “On the one hand ... the more we distance Paul from the miraculous, the less we understand him, his theology, and his mission. On the other hand, ... for Paul the miraculous was both broader and functionally different than for Jesus.”

Paul and Miracles in the Book of Acts	
Miracles accomplished by Paul	Miracles happening to Paul
Acts 19:11-12 (extraordinary miracles)	Acts 21:11 (Agabus's prophecy)
Acts 20:9-10 (Eutychus's resurrection)	Acts 22:17-21 (Paul's ecstasy)
Acts 28:7-8 (Paul heals the father of Poplius, the Roman leader of Malta)	Acts 23:11 (vision)
Acts 28:9 (Paul heals many on Malta)	Acts 23:16 (Paul's nephew uncovering a conspiracy)
	Acts 27:23-26 (epiphany of an angel during storm)
	Acts 28:3-6 (Paul unscathed after being bitten by a snake)

So let us first turn to miracles performed by Paul as recounted in Acts. The first miracle we meet is in fact an act of power-play (Acts 13:6-12). On Cyprus, Paul is confronted with Bar-Jesus, also called Elymas, a Jewish pseudo-prophet. The Book of Acts describes him as a magician with an influential position at the residence of Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of the island. When Elymas wants to keep the proconsul from listening to Paul, the apostle announces that God will hit him with temporary blindness. Thus it turns out that the message about Jesus is stronger than the anti-gospel activities of Bar-Jesus.

Acts 14:3 recounts that the Lord granted signs and wonders (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα) to be done by the hands of the apostles Paul and Barnabas during their stay at Iconium. These signs and wonders are described as *bearing witness* to the word of grace. In fact, it is the Lord himself who does these miracles. The wording implies that the “word of grace” is the focus of what happens. Miracles, thus, function as amplifiers of the word. And, as any hifi-enthusiast knows, an amplifier is never – and should never be – the source of the sound, yet it plays an important role in its playback, as it can either distort or as flawlessly as technically possible represent the original input.

In the following part of the chapter, Acts 14:8-20, we can see how a spectacular miracle happens – yet at the same time distorts understanding. When at Lystra, Paul miraculously heals a crippled man. However, the witnessing crowds attribute – quite logically within their worldview – the miracle to the Greek gods and conclude that Zeus himself in the human form of Barnabas, and Hermes

incarnated in Paul have arrived in their midst. Both apostles can hardly keep the priest of the local Zeus-temple from sacrificing to them oxen decorated with garlands. Upon arrival of Jews from Antiochia and Iconium, the atmosphere changes radically, the mood of the crowd turns 180 degrees, and instead of seeing Paul as a god, they begin to stone him. We can conclude that a miracle without the correct frame of reference may cause almost fatal misunderstandings.

When Barnabas and Paul return after their missionary trip, they report at the so called Apostolic Council of Jerusalem about the “signs and wonders” (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα) God has done among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12). Note that, again, it is not the apostles who perform these miracles, but God himself is seen as the author.

A very interesting miracle happens when Paul is in Philippi and exorcizes a psychic spirit⁸ from a slave-girl (Acts 16:12-40). As Luke depicts it, the question at stake hinges on the claim: Who is the true lord within this Roman colony?⁹ Are it the owners (κύριοι)¹⁰ of the slave-girl? Is it Mammon, the god of money, worshipped by the owners, as turns out when they see that at the very moment the future-predicting spirit went out of the girl (ἐξῆλθεν αὐτῆ τῆ ὥρα), their hope of profit went away too (ἐξῆλθεν ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς ἐργασίας αὐτῶν)?¹¹ Are it the magistrates (στρατηγοί) of the city? Are it Paul and Silas, whom the keeper of the prison calls “sirs” (“lords” – κύριοι)¹² after an earthquake opens the doors of the prison? Or is it Jesus Christ, whom Paul and Silas proclaim as Lord (πίστευσον ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον Ἰησοῦν)?¹³

Interestingly, Acts 19:6 tells how Paul meets with a group of disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus. After their being baptized in the name of Jesus,¹⁴ Paul lays his hands upon them; they receive the Holy Spirit together with the miracle of glossolalia.¹⁵ The same chapter (Acts 19:11-12) tells in general about extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, to the amount that even “handkerchiefs or aprons were carried away from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them, and evil spirits came out of them.”¹⁶ Again, the Book of Acts underlines that God himself did these miracles.

Acts 20:9-10 tells about Eutychus, who in contrast to the meaning of his name had the bad luck not only to fall asleep during a sermon of the apostle –

8 Acts 16:16, “πνεῦμα πύθωνα,” which for the intended readers of Acts invokes the picture of the Delphi oracle with its myth about the god Apollo who slew his enemy, the serpent called Python.

9 Acts 16:12 (κολωνία).

10 Acts 16:19.

11 Acts 16:19.

12 Acts 16:30.

13 Acts 16:31.

14 Acts 19:5, interestingly, this is a kind of ‘anabaptism.’

15 Acts 19:6.

16 Acts 19:12.

yes, such happened even to Saint Paul – but also to fall out of the third floor window-sill in which he was sitting. They take him up for dead. Luckily, Paul revives him and, thus, he can continue his talk. It is not sure whether this is a resurrection-miracle, because Paul reassures the people who think that Eutychus died “that his life is in him.”¹⁷

After the shipwrecking on Malta, Paul heals the father of Publius, the chief of the island and subsequently cures many people from their diseases.¹⁸

Yet, God not only does miracles *through* Paul; there are also miracles happening *around* Paul and his mission. After his initial encounter with the resurrected Messiah,¹⁹ Paul has dreams and visions, in which Jesus encourages him. After his vocation, he falls into a trance when praying in the Jerusalem temple. Jesus tells him to quickly leave the city and sends him as a preacher to the Gentiles.²⁰ Famous is his dream of a Macedonian man who beseeches him to come over to Macedonia, as it were a reversal of the victorious campaign of Alexander the Great, who went from Macedonia to the East; the beginning of Hellenism against which the Pharisee Paul had been fighting fiercely.²¹ Upon entering Corinth, Jesus tells Paul in a vision during the night not to be afraid, ascertaining that he “has many people in this city.”²² Paul himself tells the elders of the church of Ephesus, after having summoned them to come to Miletus, that the Holy Spirit testifies to him during his travelling to Jerusalem, that imprisonment and affliction are waiting him there.²³ The prophet Agabus affirms this, a prophecy that does not make easier Paul’s decision to travel further to Jerusalem against all odds.²⁴ After his interrogation by the Sanhedrin, Jesus appears to him during the night, encourages him and tells him that he will testify about the gospel in Rome.²⁵ Even in the midst of a terrible storm, an angel appears to him in the night, telling him that he has to testify before Caesar, therefore he and the whole crew of the ship will survive their ordeal.²⁶ Moreover, things happen with Paul that can be explained away as coincidences, but probably are more than that: he survives stoning,²⁷ the doors of his prison open by an earthquake at the moment they are singing psalms,²⁸ Paul’s nephew

17 Acts 20:10: “ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἔστιν.”

18 Acts 28:7-9.

19 Acts 9:3-6.

20 Acts 22:17-21.

21 Acts 16:9-10.

22 Acts 18:9-10.

23 Acts 20:23.

24 Acts 21:11.

25 Acts 23:11.

26 Acts 27:23-26.

27 Acts 14:19-20.

28 Acts 16:25-26.

uncovers a conspiracy just in time,²⁹ and Paul escapes unscathed after being bitten by a snake.³⁰

Some examples are perhaps borderline cases that can be explained as miracles, but also as coincidental events. This may be an indicator to something more all-encompassing, pointing to the reality that what used to be called ‘miracles’ are things that, for us, happen on a scale from ‘normal’ through ‘miraculous,’ but for the New Testament authors these things are all happenings in which God is involved, even if this is not always mentioned. Miraculous events occur during Paul’s sufferings, too. Jesus does not eliminate all suffering in the life of his followers. This is an important sign: miracles can play a part *within* Christian suffering, yet not as a *victory over* suffering.³¹

However, we still have to answer one question, namely: What counts as a miracle? This is in fact a preliminary question, but sometimes it works rather well to pose preliminary questions in retrospect. Or perhaps the question should rather be: What counted as a miracle for people of the first century within the Greco-Roman world? In addition, were miracles viewed differently depending on to what ethnic or social group someone belonged?³² From contemporary Jewish literature we know that miracles recounted in the biblical books were generally accepted. Everything that did not fit into the everyday experience could be called a miracle. Moreover, we find – with the exception of the writings of Philo – an interest in miracles as part of contemporary experience in 2 Maccabees, the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Josephus, as well as in other contemporary Judaic literature.³³

Interestingly, within the Book of Deuteronomy the expression “signs and wonders”³⁴ refers in most cases to God’s mighty deeds as part of the Exodus-story to free his people from slavery under the Pharaoh.³⁵ It would be interesting to take this into account when we read about “signs and wonders” in the New Tes-

²⁹ Acts 23:16. I always remained curious what happened to the more than forty persons who bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-13). They either died from starvation, or found a way to redeem their overconfident vows (Lev 27:9-29). The latter seems the most plausible solution.

³⁰ Acts 28:3-6.

³¹ Cf. Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter*, 290.

³² See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 20–27.

³³ See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 31–60.

³⁴ “אוֹתוֹת וּמִוִּפְתֹּיִם,” LXX “σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα,” Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:2; 34:11, cf. Exod 7:3; Neh 9:10; Ps 78:43; 105:5.27; 135:9; Jer 32:20-21.

³⁵ See also Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter*, 268; Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 210.

tament: they are probably an indication of God’s new Exodus, liberating slaves of idols from their idolatry.

When focusing on the apostle Paul and the miraculous, the conclusions based on the Book of Acts are the following: 1) the borders between what we would call miraculous or what we would call coincidental are not so clear-cut in the mind of first century Christians, 2) we should not only concentrate on miracles worked by the apostle, but also on miracles happening to him in his proclamation of the gospel, 3) God uses both ongoing suffering and miraculous rescue in the mission of the apostle. We could take these conclusions with us in our toolbox when approaching Paul’s letters.

3. Allusions to Signs, Wonders, and Mighty Works in Paul’s Letters

Now we can turn to how signs, wonders, and mighty works play a part in Paul’s letters. We should take into account beforehand that Paul not only mentions miracles happening through him or, for that matter, experienced by him. Paul writes to communities that came into existence through the proclamation of God’s kingdom in the Messiah Jesus. This means that everyone who belongs to this new family of God may experience God’s power and be witness to things that humanly speaking always seemed impossible. For the scope of this study, however, I will focus on miracles wrought or experienced by the apostle as gleaned from his own correspondence.

Paul and Miracles in his Letters	
Miracles accomplished by Paul	Miracles happening to Paul / in the wake of the proclamation of the gospel
Rom 15:19 (“power of signs and wonders” [ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων])	1 Cor 12:9-10, 28–29 (healings, tongues and powers [δυνάμεις])
1 Cor 2:4 “demonstrating of Spirit and power”	1 Cor 14:18-19 Paul’s regularly speaking in tongues
1 Cor 4:20 (“the kingdom does not consist in talk, but in power”)	2 Cor 4:7-12 (despite being persecuted, Paul can complete his mission)
2 Cor 6:7 (proclamation of the gospel “by God’s power”)	2 Cor 6:1-10 (despite hardships, Paul can continue his vocation)

Paul and Miracles in his Letters	
Miracles accomplished by Paul	Miracles happening to Paul / in the wake of the proclamation of the gospel
2 Cor 12:12 (“signs of an apostle”: signs, miracles, and wonders [σημεῖα, τέρατα, δυνάμεις])	2 Cor 11:23-27 (Paul can go on, despite difficulties)
1 Thess 1:5 (arrival of the gospel not only in words, but also in power)	2 Cor 12:1-5 (heavenly vision of paradise)
1 Tim 4:14 (Timothy’s special charisma given to him by the council of elders’ laying on of hands)	Gal 3:5 (God working miracles [δυνάμεις] among the Galatians)
2 Tim 1:6 (Timothy’s special charisma given to him by Paul’s laying on of hands)	Gal 6:17 (Paul bearing in his body “the marks of Jesus” [τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ])
	Eph 1:19; 3:20 (greatness of God’s power in believers)
	Eph 6:12 (spiritual warfare against demonic powers)
	Col 1:29 (Christ working through Paul with power)
	2 Thess 2:9 (false signs and wonders performed by Satan)
	1 Tim 4:1 (new revelation: “the Spirit expressly says ...”)

We will have a closer look at the allusions to miracles wrought by Paul, or happening as a consequence of the proclamation of Jesus as Lord. It is difficult to make a sharp distinction here between both categories. In Rom 15:18-19, Paul summarizes his missionary work as “what the Messiah has done through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders,³⁶ by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of the Messiah.” Paul depicts himself as a priest who brings to God the offering

³⁶ Rom 15:19, “ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων.”

consisting of the Gentiles who turned to God.³⁷ Within this context, he mentions that all his results are due to what Christ has done through him. His aim was that the Gentiles would be obedient to God, in line with God's promise of old to Abraham. Signs and wonders appear to refer, in line with what we saw in the Book of Deuteronomy, to the new Exodus by which God liberates Gentiles from under the power of the idols. Miracles are, thus, one of the methods used by the Spirit to attain God's aim.

"My word and my message were not through persuading words of wisdom but in demonstrating of Spirit and power," Paul states in 1 Cor 2:4. Perhaps Paul is not referring to miracles here, as he has been negative about Jews asking signs,³⁸ however, for Jews a 'sign' was not in the first place a miracle, but might have been a reference to a cosmological event.³⁹ The word 'power'⁴⁰ is used, here, in the singular, but also the singular can refer to miracles.⁴¹

Paul similarly uses the word power,⁴² when he asserts in 1 Cor 4:20 that "the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power." When Paul contrasts power with mere talking, he anyhow refers to some manifestation.⁴³ However it is not clear whether Paul was thinking about miracles, or about "coming with a rod,"⁴⁴ in order to teach the "arrogant ones" in Corinth a lesson. Paul contrasts the power of the kingdom with the actions of those arrogant people: "I will find out not the talk of those arrogant people, but their power."⁴⁵ Interestingly, Paul mentions power in connection with the "kingdom of God," an expression that is rare in his letters,⁴⁶ apparently referring to God's reign, or may be used as a synonym for the word 'gospel.'⁴⁷

Among the list of charismata in 1 Cor 12, Paul mentions "gifts of healings,"⁴⁸ "kinds of tongues,"⁴⁹ and "workings of powers"⁵⁰ next to more mundane gifts of helping, administration, wisdom, faith, knowledge, and so on. The apostle makes no distinction between what modern scholars would call 'natural' and 'supernatural' gifts, most probably because Paul considers all of them as coming from

37 Rom 15:16.

38 1 Cor 1:22.

39 See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 197.

40 "δύναμις."

41 See Mark 6:5; 9:39; cf. Luke 5:17; 6:19; 8:46. See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 184 nt. 35.

42 "δύναμις."

43 See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 202.

44 1 Cor 4:21.

45 1 Cor 4:19.

46 Other mentions only in Rom 14:17 and Eph 5:5.

47 See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 203.

48 1 Cor 12:9,28,30, "χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων."

49 1 Cor 12:10,28, "γένη γλωσσῶν," cf. 1 Cor 12:30.

50 1 Cor 12:10, "ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων," cf. 1 Cor 12:28, "δυνάμεις."

the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God.⁵¹ Interestingly, for Paul these miraculous gifts display how God's Spirit liberates people from idolatry.⁵² Again, for Paul signs and wonders accompany God's new Exodus.

At the same time, Paul can relativize the miraculous sides of the proclamation of the gospel. He acknowledges in 1 Cor 14:18-19 that he speaks in tongues more than all of the Corinthians, but adds that in the Christian congregation he prefers rather to speak five words in an understandable way⁵³ than 10.000 in tongues. Moreover, Paul seems well aware that playing a part in miracles should not become a kind of ego-trip. That is why he always emphasizes that it is *God* who acts, and the treasure they, as apostles, have is a treasure in earthen vessels, 2 Cor 4:7-12. So it becomes visible that the transcendent power belongs to God.

This, too, may count among the miracles, that Paul can continue his mission despite many hardships, 2 Cor 6:1-10 and 2 Cor 11:23-27. All these events may point to Paul's motivation and resilience, but there is definitely something of God's miraculous power in it. When he summarizes in what way he has served the gospel, he mentions that he acted "by God's power,"⁵⁴ 2 Cor 6:7. Within the context, Paul may have in mind the widest spectrum of the miraculous.⁵⁵ He does not want to boast about his own miraculous experiences, therefore he refers to himself in the anonym mode, as having been lifted up into the heavenly Paradise, hearing 'unspeakable words,' 2 Cor 12:1-5, as already discussed above.

One of the most pronounced passages when studying Paul's role in performing miracles is 2 Cor 12:11-12. He feels compelled by the Corinthians to behave foolishly by referring to his 'credentials' as an apostle: "because the apostolic signs were performed among you in all perseverance, with *signs, wonders and powers*."⁵⁶ From Josephus's use of the expression "σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα," it is clear that these words refer to 'supernatural' events.⁵⁷ As mentioned before, the Septuagint uses the expression mainly to refer to the story of the Exodus.⁵⁸ Interestingly, Paul does not say that he performed miracles, but uses the passive voice – miracles "were performed" – in order to emphasize that God was the source of these signs,

51 1 Cor 12:4-11.

52 1 Cor 12:2.

53 1 Cor 14:19, "τῷ νοῖ."

54 2 Cor 6:7, "ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ."

55 See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 207.

56 2 Cor 12:12, "σημείους τε καὶ τέρασιν καὶ δυνάμεσιν."

57 Flavius Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.28 (τὴν τε τῆς ὅλης πόλεως ἄλωσιν καὶ τὰ πρὸ ταύτης σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα); *Ant.* 20.168 (δείξειν γὰρ ἔφασαν ἐναργῆ τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα κατὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν γινόμενα). For text, see B. Niese, *Flavii Iosephi Opera* (Berlin: Weidmann 1892) III. Referred to by Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 209.

58 See also Bar 2:11, "Καὶ νῦν, Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ, ὃς ἐξήγαγες τὸν λαόν σου ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου ἐν χειρὶ κραταιᾷ καὶ ἐν σημείοις καὶ ἐν τέρασι καὶ ἐν δυνάμει μεγάλῃ καὶ ἐν βραχίονι ὑψηλῷ καὶ ἐποίησας σεαυτῷ ὄνομα ὡς ἡ ἡμέρα αὐτῆ."

wonders, and powers, although it was through Paul that God did them.⁵⁹ Otherwise, they could not have counted as the “signs of a true apostle.” Paul’s statement is that he is not inferior to the “super-apostles,”⁶⁰ because the signs of an apostle were performed by him. This may imply that these “super-apostles” performed miracles and that the presence of miracles was seen as the sign of being a true apostle. Acts 5:15 and 19:11-12 seem to imply that the apostles did not have to be involved always actively in the performing of miracles: they happened in and through their presence.

In Gal 3:5, Paul similarly writes about miracles happening among his readers: “Does he who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles⁶¹ among you do this by the works of the Law or because you believe what you heard?” Of course, this passage does not only refer to miracles conducted by Paul himself or restricted to his presence. Paul writes that God gave those miracles. Yet, anyhow, these miracles entered the lives of the addressees together with the arrival of the apostle’s gospel.

At the end of his letter to the Galatians, Paul asserts that no one should trouble him, because he “wears the marks of Jesus⁶² in his body,” Gal 6:17. This expression, the ‘stigmata’ of Jesus refers most probably to the visible scars of wounds inflicted upon him during his missionary activities. Thus, Paul sees both his suffering for the gospel and the fact that this suffering could not stop the proclamation of Jesus Christ as a sign of the suffering and victorious Messiah he proclaims.⁶³

In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul⁶⁴ several times refers to God’s miraculous power. Ephesians 1:19 mentions “the immeasurable greatness of his power⁶⁵ in

⁵⁹ Cf. Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 213; Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter*, 275.

⁶⁰ 2 Cor 12:11.

⁶¹ Gal 3:5 “ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις.” The verb ἐνεργέω often is used in the New Testament to refer to the working of miracles, e.g. Matt 14:2; Mark 6:14; 1 Cor 12:6.11; Eph 1:20; 3:20; Col 1:29; Jas 5:16. Cf. Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 190 nt. 78.

⁶² Gal 6:17, “τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.”

⁶³ The bodily “signs of Jesus” are clearly contrasted to the identification mark of the circumcision, and matter more to Paul than the Jewish sign of the covenant, as mentioned in Gal 6:15. See also N.T. Wright, *Paul. A Biography* (London: SPCK 2018) 124.

⁶⁴ According to C. H. Dodd, the anonymous author of Ephesians puts the crown on Pauline theology. See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 276. This would be rather exceptional, because really great theologians, like Paul, Augustine, or Thomas Aquinas, are sporadic. An unknown nameless author, who happens to bring Pauline theology to its climax, would by this mere fact strongly point to Paul himself. Anyhow, referring to Ephesians as the highpoint of Pauline thinking is surely to the point. See also Wright, *Paul. A Biography*, 294–295. N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 4; Minneapolis: Fortress 2013) 56–60, wonders what would have happened if Christian theology would have focused on Ephesians, instead of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Ephesians emphasizes the importance of the unity of the Church as originating in the unity of God – there is only one God, so there can be only one people of that one God. Church history could have taken a different turn with Ephesians in the center of theology – but maybe it is still not too late to try this theological avenue. For a short summary on the pros and cons of Pauline authorship for Ephesians, see also Wright, *Paul. A Biography*, 285–286.

⁶⁵ Eph 1:19, “τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ.”

us who believe, according to the working of his great might.” This may not be specifically a reference to miracles, even if having faith in God is depicted as something for which God’s power was necessary. Similarly, Eph 3:20 highlights that glory be to God who “by the power at work within us⁶⁶ is able to do far more abundantly⁶⁷ than all what we ask or think.” Again, this is about the gospel being more than mere words, attaining unexpected changes in the lives of humans. As in the Acts of the Apostles, Eph 6:12 warns its readers that not only God disposes of mighty powers, but God’s enemies as well. Therefore, they should know that their battle is not against general human powers, but “against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”⁶⁸

Paul⁶⁹ mentions in Col 1:29 that he taught everyone in every wisdom, to make everyone perfect in Christ – that is the reason that he toils, striving with all the energy that Christ “works through him in power.”⁷⁰ Although miracles are not mentioned explicitly, there is more than only talk and teaching to the gospel.

According to 1 Thess 1:5, “Our gospel did not only arrive to you in word, but also in power, by Holy Spirit and in much fullness.”⁷¹ Although exegetes argue that this text does not refer to miracles, it seems likely that Paul states that his verbal message was underlined by other phenomena that were more than coincidental events.⁷² It appears that the singular “power,” can be used to refer to miracles.⁷³

Miracles, however, not only happen at God’s side, but can also be performed by God’s enemies. That is why Paul points out in 2 Thess 2:8-10 that the appearance⁷⁴ of the “lawless one”⁷⁵ will be with all the energy of the Satan in all kind of pretended power, signs and wonders,⁷⁶ and with all wicked deception.⁷⁷ A miracle, therefore, is not by itself automatically something good; it depends on its source! Just as Jesus mentioned according to Mark 13:22, “there will

66 Eph 3:20, “κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἡμῖν.”

67 Eph 3:20, “τῷ δὲ δυνάμει ὑπὲρ πάντα ποιῆσαι ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ.”

68 Eph 6:12, “ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἡμῖν ἡ πάλη πρὸς αἷμα καὶ σάρκα ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὰς ἀρχάς, πρὸς τὰς ἐξουσίας, πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τούτου, πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις.” Cf. 1 Pet 3:22.

69 According to some scholars a post-Pauline anonymous writer.

70 Col 1:29, “κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐν δυνάμει.”

71 1 Thess 1:5, “ἐν δυνάμει καὶ ἐν πνεύματι ἀγίῳ καὶ [ἐν] πληροφορίᾳ πολλῇ.” Twelftree (*Paul and the Miraculous*, 186) translates “πληροφορία πολλῇ” as “with great effect.”

72 See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 180–187.

73 See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 184 nt. 5.

74 2 Thess 2:9, “ἡ παρουσία.”

75 2 Thess 2:8, “ὁ ἄνομος.”

76 2 Thess 2:9, “ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει καὶ σημείοις καὶ τέρασιν ψεύδους.”

77 Didache 16:4 takes up this theme: “καὶ τότε φανήσεται ὁ κοσμοπλανῆς ὡς υἱὸς θεοῦ, καὶ ποιήσει σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα, καὶ ἡ γῆ παραδοθήσεται εἰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ, καὶ ποιήσει ἀθέμιτα, ἃ οὐδέποτε γέγονεν ἐξ αἰῶνος.”

rise pseudo-messiahs and pseudo-prophets and they will give signs and wonders⁷⁸ to lead astray, if it were possible, the chosen ones.” We could argue that in this passage, Paul distances himself from the miraculous,⁷⁹ yet it may also imply that the readers knew how the power of the gospel, too, has its miraculous side. The devil being the ‘ape of God’ tries to reproduce this, just as the magicians of the Pharaoh were able to reproduce Moses’s miracles. In parentheses, the wisdom of this always escaped me. Since it seemed to me rather stupid to call into being even more serpents (Exod 7:12) and to make even more water undrinkable by transforming it into blood (Exod 8:22).

In the letters to Timothy, several allusions occur to the miraculous. In 1 Tim 4:1 we find expressed that “the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” The present tense used for the utterances of the Spirit probably do not refer to the Old Testament or sayings of Jesus, but to fresh prophecies.⁸⁰ A mention to prophecy we find also in 1 Tim 4:14, where Timothy is reminded of the charisma given to him through prophecy and the laying on of hands by the council of elders. The same event is referred to in 2 Tim 1:6, there apparently given through the laying on of hands by Paul. This reminder aims at encouraging Timothy that “we did not receive a spirit of timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.”

Based on the above, we can conclude that wherever the gospel appears, miraculous events are to be expected, since the gospel is the unleashing of God’s power that manifested itself in creation, salvation, and in the resurrection of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah. A proclamation of the resurrected Christ without humanly unexpected events would be no gospel for Paul. To these powerful events could be added the eschatological miracles expected by Paul, e.g. the expectance that Christ “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself,”⁸¹ or that “the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”⁸²

78 Mark 13:22, “σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα.”

79 See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 280.

80 Cf. Twelftree, 283.

81 Phil 3:21.

82 1 Thess 4:16-17.

Apart from allusions to powerful events, Paul at least two times mentions in so many words that miracles were conducted by him, in Rom 15:19 and 2 Cor 12:12. In the latter passage, these “signs and wonders” count as an authentication of his apostleship. Even if Paul does not mention details about these miracles, it cannot be denied that according to Paul himself he, indeed, did accomplish miracles. This concurs with the picture of Paul from Acts, even though Acts has more concrete details, while Paul himself appears to be more reticent to go into details within his letters. Still, what could the poor apostle do to defend himself? Let us imagine that it had been the other way around: scarce details in Acts and ample juicy details about miracles performed by Paul in his own letters. What would have been our reaction? Probably something along the lines of: “This man is just boasting, therefore cannot be believed.” This is the ‘catch 22’ of any exegesis: whatever you do is always wrong if you are approached with suspicion.

4. Paul’s Holistic Approach

We see, thus, in Paul’s letters⁸³ a very much holistic approach. For him, his gospel consisted of more than merely talk about God’s coming kingdom. The reality of this kingdom is already entering the present. Based upon Paul’s letters, we see how he viewed this powerful, in the sight of two-dimensional human beings even miraculous side of the proclamation of Jesus as Messiah and Lord. These miracles are, for him, events worked by God, oftentimes through the serving of the apostles that go beyond human possibilities.⁸⁴ Miraculous events were for Paul more than just an occasional ‘spin-off’ from the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but an integral part of his worldview.⁸⁵ The gospel, therefore, always implies word and deed, and receives evidence of its truth in that

⁸³ A byproduct of studying how the miraculous functions in the Pauline letters is that it offers an argument that the letters considered by scholarly consensus as being pseudepigraphic do not display forms of hagiography, depicting Paul as a super-apostle, who conducts miracles and has a life filled with miraculous events, as e.g. found in *The Acts of Paul*. See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 298–300. Whether this can be accepted as a sign of their being authentic letters of the apostle himself is, of course, up for discussion. However, this strengthens the opinion that if they are actually letters written by Paul, their limited attention to the miraculous makes it possible, for that matter, to place them within the Pauline corpus. If, on the contrary, they are not by Paul’s hand, they confirm that Paul is basically not depicted otherwise by others than what he shows of himself in his letters.

⁸⁴ Cf. S. Alkier, *Wunder und Wirklichkeit in den Briefen des Apostels Paulus: Ein Beitrag zu einem Wunderverständnis jenseits von Entmythologisierung und Rehistorisierung* (WUNT 134; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001) 306: “Wunder sind von Gott oder mit Gottes Kraft gewirkte, menschliche Möglichkeiten übersteigende Geschehnisse.” [emphasis in original].

⁸⁵ Cf. Alkier, *Wunder und Wirklichkeit*, 306: “Das paulinische Wunderverständnis ist integraler Bestandteil seiner gesamten Theologie und Weltansicht. Paulinisches Christentum ohne Gottes Wunder

God's Holy Spirit accomplishes what is humanly speaking impossible.⁸⁶ Compared with the Old Testament mention of signs and wonders, usually referring to God's liberating action in the Exodus, the New Testament use of the phrase 'signs and wonders' may implicitly point to a new Exodus.

Miracles did not only happen *through* Paul, but also happened *to* him. However, for Paul signs, wonders, and mighty works are a reality, yet they do not seem to form a special category for him. Powerful signs go together with the proclamation of his gospel, but they are not qualitatively different from God's power enabling Paul to fulfil his God-given assignment to proclaim Jesus as Savior and Lord to all nations. As a result of such a way of thinking, even his wounds in the mission work are 'stigmata' of Jesus.⁸⁷ So tenacity in suffering is a miracle as well.

Central to his thought about miracles is God's power in the resurrection of Christ and the turning to God of until then pagan people, forming a new family of God. When dealing with the question of miracles, modernity usually focuses on the more 'miraculous' miracles, either by denying or affirming that such miracles can or could exist. Paul, however, gives these 'miraculous miracles' their relative place: they are to serve the goal that believers develop a new behavior and a new living together that is transformed according to God's will.⁸⁸

At the same time, signs can also be overrated, as Paul is complaining in 1 Cor 1:22, "The Jews keep requiring miraculous signs!" Therefore, Paul does not reject signs and miracles, but he rather refers to the greater miracle, namely Jesus's resurrection after his scandalous death on the cross.⁸⁹ Sometimes, however signs are not directed at people being already Christians, but at the outsiders, as e.g. Paul ascertains about glossolalia.⁹⁰

ist nicht mehr paulinisches Christentum." See also Karl Gatzweiler, "La conception paulinienne du miracle," *ETL* 37/4 (1961) 836–837.

⁸⁶ See Twelftree, *Paul and the Miraculous*, 225.

⁸⁷ Gal 6:17.

⁸⁸ See Rom 12:1-2. According to Thomas F. Best, "St. Paul and the Decline of the Miraculous," *Enc* 44/3 (1983) 239–240, the presence of miraculous events declined within the Early Church in a way to be expected: "Paul does not experience the decline of the miraculous as a problem: for him it is the natural result of growth beyond the initial stage of the Christian movement, where the miraculous served to establish Messianic identity, to a later stage in which the establishment of an on-going community is paramount." G.W. Derickson, "The Cessation of Healing Miracles in Paul's Ministry," *BSac* 155 (1998) 299–315, claims – referring to the illnesses of Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25-30), Timothy (1 Tim 5:23), and Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20) – that during or after his first Roman imprisonment Paul's ability to heal left him. However, this claim needs a certain reconstruction of Paul's life and the chronological order of his letters that is not at all generally accepted. Moreover, Acts 12:1-17 depicts similar ambiguous situations: Herod (Agrippa I) killed James the brother of John, while Peter whom Herod destined for the same fate was miraculously freed from prison – even Peter himself (Acts 12:11) and the praying congregation (Acts 12:13-15) hardly could believe this.

⁸⁹ Cf. Gatzweiler, "La conception paulinienne du miracle," 823.

⁹⁰ 1 Cor 14:22.

Moreover, Paul knows that the ‘dark side’ will use similar signs and wonders in opposition to the gospel.⁹¹ This echoes what is found in the Old Testament, that there can be seers and miracle workers who make use of miracles or dreams for evil aims.⁹² This means that miracles in themselves do not have messages, their meaning depends on the context of the proclamation of the gospel.⁹³ Therefore, a miracle is not by itself automatically good, its goodness depends on its source!

Intriguingly, nowhere in his letters Paul refers to the miracles of Jesus that play such an important part in the gospel traditions.⁹⁴ Is this by chance? Did he perhaps mention the works of Christ in his teachings?⁹⁵ This is the more interesting, because from his letters we know Paul knew far more about Jesus and his works than usually is thought.⁹⁶ However, the explanation for not referring to the miracles Jesus did during his public career may be obvious, just hiding in broad daylight. The Acts of the Apostles depicts Jesus’s miracles as an ongoing phenomenon, even after his resurrection and ascension. *Jesus* does these miracles, as the apostles over and again point out to their critics and their public.⁹⁷ It is Jesus’s *ongoing presence* they experience. They see his continuing presence in action through his Spirit, in worship, but also in miracles happening.⁹⁸ It is as if Jesus simply did not go away.⁹⁹ Which was a source of serious concern for the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem,¹⁰⁰ and a source of joy for Jesus’s followers. So why would they refer to yesteryear’s miracles, if they experienced miracles Jesus was doing all around them?

At the same time, we see that miraculous healings or other miraculous events never become a ‘standard treatment’ or a kind of panacea within the proclamation of the gospel. Paul experienced how healings occurred, but some people remained in their suffering and illness. This is exactly what we should expect

91 2 Thess 2:9.

92 Deut 13:2-3.

93 Cf. Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter*, 281: “[D]ie Wunder allein sagen noch nichts aus über ihren ‘Verursacher,’ vielmehr bedürfen sie des Kontexts des sie deutenden Wortes. Erst als Wunder im Raum des Evangeliums können Wunder für Christen Zeichen der Nähe und Macht Gottes sein.”

94 Cf. Gatzweiler, “La conception paulinienne du miracle,” 845.

95 E.g. as is related about Peter in Acts 2:22.

96 See J. Doedens, “Paul: The Only Stranger in Jerusalem Who Does Not Know the Things That Have Happened?,” *SF* 19/2 (2015) 45–56.

97 See e.g. Acts 4:8-10.

98 According to Wright, the awareness of Jesus’s personal and powerful ongoing presence was, together with the expectation of the return of Yhwh, and Jesus’s resurrection as vindication of his implicit and explicit messianic claims, one of the three factors that explains “the almost instantaneous rise of the christology we find already firmly established by the time of Paul.” Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 690.

99 See e.g. Acts 5:12-16.

100 See e.g. Acts 4:16-17; 5:28.

when talking about miracles: they remain a mystery and are never solely in human hands.¹⁰¹

Paul's view on miracles, however, differs substantively from the worldview of Deism that became the default perspective since early modernity. To attach a date to these changes in worldviews, N.T. Wright counts the rediscovery of Lucretius's *De rerum naturae*,¹⁰² a century before the Lutheran Reformation, in 1417, as a turning point in Western religious history.¹⁰³ This deistic worldview implies an 'ugly broad ditch'¹⁰⁴ between heaven and earth. God (or the gods) are thought to be upstairs, every now and then intervening in what happens downstairs. Humans are souls trapped in bodies, far away from their real heavenly home. When they die, they – hopefully, and this is what 'religion' is all about in deistic theology – go to heaven, freed from the prison of their bodies. Deistic theology, thus, provides us with the famous categories of the 'natural' and the 'supernatural.' Miracles are the 'supernatural' things that happen if God deems it necessary to intervene from his far-away heaven into the otherwise 'natural' earthly events. The Bible does not share this dualistic view, and Paul's thinking about the miraculous fits within the biblical thinking. The risk when we talk about 'miracles' is that, unbeknownst, we accept the deistic worldview we are surrounded by, namely that miracles are a kind of 'invasion' from the supernatural into the natural world.¹⁰⁵ The second step is that we think we have to defend 'miracles' as proof for the Christian claims. We should, therefore, be careful, lest we read this into the biblical accounts of miracles. Paul's view on miracles, however, fits completely within the Old Testament view on heaven and earth as partly separated by human sin, yet meant to be intertwined. Miracles point to a future, in which God's domain and human domain, heaven and earth are joined anew, and God's will is done on earth as in heaven.

101 As phrased by Wright: "the early followers of Jesus knew very well that, just as Jesus himself had gone about healing people, so they too were entrusted with this gift – not all the time and never simply at their own whim, but with a lasting and powerful effect that carried its own evidential weight. Writing his letters ... Paul would refer to the same kind of healing power working through him and through others – just as he would also refer to illnesses, his own and those of others, that were not healed, or not in the way one had hoped. The mystery remained, but the power remained too." Wright, *Paul. A Biography*, 57.

102 The manuscript was rediscovered by Poggio Bracciolini in a German monastery. See Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things: De Rerum Natura* (trans. W.E. Leonard) (Sweden: Timaios Press 2013).

103 See N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began. Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne 2018) 30–31.

104 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing used this expression to emphasize the difference between rational truths and the accidental happenings of history. See T. Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2002) 56.

105 See Wright, *Paul. A Biography*, 122: "People often think of 'miracles' as the 'invasion' of the natural order by a force from outside. That wasn't how the early Christians saw it. For them, dramatic and otherwise inexplicable healings were seen as evidence of *new creation*, of the Creator himself at work in a fresh way." [Emphasis in original].

5. General Conclusions

In Acts, we find several rather detailed portraits of the apostle Paul. These pictures contain also tableaus about a view on the miraculous part of Paul's mission. Miraculous events are not only surrounding the apostle, but he is also conducting miraculous deeds as part and parcel of his proclamation of the gospel. Next to references to "signs and wonders" in general, some concrete miraculous deeds are recounted too. Study of the apostle's epistles reveals that Paul mentions signs, wonders, and miracles as the typical signs of his apostleship. In two letters (Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12) he explicitly mentions that he conducted miracles. This means that Luke was not 'inventing' when he depicted Paul as such.¹⁰⁶ However, Paul himself always refers to these signs in a general way, not relating any details of a wonder wrought by him. Furthermore, Paul seems to have a holistic approach to these mighty deeds: they do not form a special 'supernatural' category for him, and are simply a part of the liberating action of a new Exodus God is bringing about in the proclamation of the gospel. Paul appears to be well aware that miracles can be overrated by sensation-seekers, and that 'hideous strengths'¹⁰⁷ will similarly try to mobilize counterfeit signs and wonders in opposition to the gospel. A survey of Paul's letters, thus, allows us to get a view of how the apostle sees the function of signs, wonders, and mighty works within the whole dynamics of the proclamation of the gospel. As to the question whether Paul first and foremost was a theologian or a wonder-worker, we probably have to take a broader approach. Paul was not 'doing theology' as an aim in itself, *l'art pour l'art*, but he was a deeply practical man, concerned with the lives of concrete persons and communities. Miracles wrought by him and happening to him fit seamlessly into his view that God has fulfilled his promises in Jesus as Israel's Messiah and that this is the message that must be proclaimed to people worldwide. The occasional vista his letters allow us on more or less miraculous events occurring to him or handled by him are in concordance with the broader palette Luke uses in Acts.

Interestingly, the aspect of the miraculous in the mission of Jesus is generally acknowledged. Meanwhile the miraculous in the mission of the apostles, and particularly in the life and work of the thirteenth apostle about we know most, is downplayed or overlooked in exegesis and preaching. This may be because we have forgotten that miracles through the hands of the apostles should rather be seen as the continuing presence and activity of Jesus himself. Perhaps not only

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Schreiber, *Paulus als Wundertäter*, 287.

¹⁰⁷ See the novel of C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength. A Modern Fairy-Tale for Grown-Ups* (London: The Bodley Head 1945).

people of the first century regularly imprisoned the apostle because he seemed ‘too hot to handle.’ It seems that the modern world is still locking him up in seminaries and theological institutes thus trying to make him harmless. As often pointed out by N.T. Wright: Paul might also be studied in departments of political science, social sciences, psychology, economics, philosophy, and history as one of the most influential thinkers and actors of the last two millennia.¹⁰⁸

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¹⁰⁸ Most recently, Wright, *Paul. A Biography*, 419. “[I]f we were to do Paul justice today we ought to teach him in departments of politics, ancient history, economics, and/or philosophy just as much as in divinity schools and departments of religion.” See e.g. I. McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary. The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2012) 426, who places St. Paul among thinkers like Wittgenstein, Montaigne, the Buddha, and Socrates. Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijsbert van den Brink (*Christian Dogmatics. An Introduction* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2017] 515) point to the interesting phenomenon that within philosophical circles a Paul-renaissance is happening. The authors refer to Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, John Caputo, Slavoj Žižek, and to the special issue of Donald Loose (ed.), *The Apostle Paul in Modern Philosophy, Bijdragen* 70/2 (2009) [special issue]. See also G.J. van der Heiden – G.H. van Kooten – A. Cimino (eds.), *Saint Paul and Philosophy. The Consonance of Ancient and Modern Thought* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2017).

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