

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

SOMETHING IS MISSING

Roelf L. Ruffner

March 12, 2023, at the James River Church in Joplin, Missouri, did a miracle take place? So says “Pastors” Bill Johnson of Bethel Redding in California and John Lindell of James River Church, an Assembly of God megachurch. They claim that after prayer by them and a group of women, a woman’s three missing toes gradually grew back by morning. She claimed that her toes were shot off by her angry ex-husband with a shotgun in 2015. No credible evidence of this supposed miracle has been offered to date, just a bunch of dubious testimony. It has produced a great deal of doubt and ridicule in the news media.

When I read about this online in *Charisma*, a Pentecostal-charismatic magazine, I thought, “Jesus never did it that way!” Jesus’ miracles were miraculous and immediate.

Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, If You are willing, You can make me clean. Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, I am willing; be cleansed. As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed (Mark 1:40-42).

There was no gradualism in this historic event. For the first time since the healing of Naaman of Syria, someone was healed of leprosy. “So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of

the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean” (2 Kin. 5:14). This man’s leprosy did not gradually go away but instantaneously disappeared. Jesus sent the man to make the necessary offerings before the priests in the temple in Jerusalem “**as a testimony to them**” (Mark 1:44). There was no room for doubt. This was “the real McCoy”—an authentic miracle by the Son of God.

Bill Johnson, the speaker at this revival, has a history of outlandish claims. His church gained national press coverage in December 2019 over a campaign to pray for the resurrection of a worship leader’s deceased two-year-old daughter. For six days they prayed over this little girl’s body hoping for resurrection from the dead before finally giving up. During that time a GoFundMe page was set up that raised over \$74,500 by January 2020. On the evening of March 12, 2023, Johnson called for a “creative miracle” and the woman with the missing toes responded.

This supposed miracle does not pass the exegetical test. The writer of the *Charisma* article declared that all who did not believe were just Pharisees and unbelievers. To prove his point, he goes to the sugar stick of Pentecostalism—the false claim that they can perform miracles today just as Jesus did. He quotes John 14:12-14:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

As with most of these deluded people, he forgot to ask,

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Contending FOR THE Faith™

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**Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
August 3, 1917–October 10, 2001**

“To whom is Jesus speaking ?” He is not speaking to me, the article’s writer, or any person alive today. He was speaking to the Apostles. They would be given the responsibility of proclaiming the everlasting Gospel to an unbelieving world. The miraculous gift of healing was given to them to prove that what they preached was from God.

And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. ...And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs (Mark 16:17-28, 20).

Has “the word” been confirmed once and for all (Jude 3) or does it need continual confirming? Is the word of God, the Bible (including its account of miracles) all sufficient for convincing the sinner and the skeptic or not?

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

So far the Pentecostal “pastors” have refused to supply further proof of their three-toed miracle. They claim they are protecting their “sheep” from the press and its skepticism. But the greatest miracle of all time was not hidden from skeptics.

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, We have seen the Lord. So he said to them, Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe. And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace to you! Then He said to Thomas, Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing. And Thomas answered and said to Him, My Lord and my god! Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:24-29).

[https://www.charismanews.com/culture/91878-john-lindell-modern-day-pharisees-scoff-at-incredible-miracle? \(6/7/2023\)](https://www.charismanews.com/culture/91878-john-lindell-modern-day-pharisees-scoff-at-incredible-miracle? (6/7/2023)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethel_Church_\(Redding,_California\) \(6/10/2023\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethel_Church_(Redding,_California) (6/10/2023)

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CAMPBELL: HIS DEBATES

Dabney Phillips

A person with strong convictions such as Alexander Campbell had was certain to be challenged. At first Campbell doubted the wisdom of public discussions, but, later decided that one debate did more good than a year of preaching. His initial opponent was John Walker, a Seceder Presbyterian minister. This group particularly disliked the Campbells for three reasons. First, Thomas Campbell had attempted to bring unity to the Seceder factions in Scotland. Then the Campbells had left the Seceders thinking the Seceders were beyond redemption. Finally, the Campbells accepted the Baptist teaching on the form and subject of baptism.

THE FIRST ONE

The Campbell-Walker debate was held in a small Quaker community of Mt. Pleasant, Ohio, only twenty-three miles from Bethany. It is doubtful if any of the Quakers attended the discussion as they did not believe in war, either carnal or theological. Walker, who preached for the local Seceder church in Mt. Pleasant, proved to be an unworthy opponent of Campbell. Walker spoke first and his speech was of phenomenal brevity. It lasted only two minutes and contained only 124 words. This is thought to be the shortest debate speech on record.

John Walker made four arguments in an effort to sustain infant baptism. He claimed that it came in the realm of circumcision. Since this rite was in the Old Testament, it must be included in the New, according to Mr. Walker. He argued that the household baptisms recorded in the book of Acts included infants (Acts 16:15). Finally, he thought that since infant baptism was such an old practice, it might be right.

Alexander Campbell scripturally answered each argument. One of his obvious answers was that only the male babies in the Old Testament were circumcised, but that infant girls were baptized. That infant baptism was not performed on the eighth day and was not a badge of nationality. Campbell again had no difficulty in showing that we are not living under the Old Testament dispensation (Jer. 31:31-34). Regarding the point of household baptism including infants, he stated that members of the household were old enough to hear, believe, and to rejoice in obeying the Lord. Campbell answered the argument of infant baptism being an old practice by saying that it fell two hundred years short of the apostles. Tertullian, who preached during the years 194 A.D. to 216 A.D., was the first to mention the practice of infant baptism, and he does so to

condemn the practice as a tradition without New Testament approval. The audience was as surprised as Campbell when on the second day of the debate, Walker insisted that each debater make only one speech on the mode of baptism. Campbell did agree to close the debate early, but only after each speaker had presented two speeches on the subject.

NEXT: THE MCCALLA DEBATE

The Presbyterians were unhappy with John Walker's debating and sought a more able opponent for Alexander Campbell, who had issued a challenge at the close of the Walker debate to discuss the infant baptism issue with a representative opponent. William McCalla of Augusta, Kentucky, accepted the challenge. The discussion was conducted in Washington, Kentucky, October 14-23, 1823. Campbell rode horseback 300 miles to the debate. With Campbell was Signey Rigdon, who later defected to the Mormons and aided Joseph Smith in translating the old Spaulding novel manuscript into the book of Mormon.

McCalla made the same argument as Walker, but with more skill. Prior to the debate he tried to poison, the minds of the people against Campbell by implying that Campbell was a false teacher and emotionally disturbed regarding religion. Throughout the debate McCalla read from a manuscript and failed to give serious attention to the arguments Campbell made. The debate lasted eight days, during which time Campbell nailed down how to "rightly divide the word" of God. He proved immersion to be the form of baptism practiced in the New Testament by means of Greek dictionaries, church histories, and especially the History of the Greek Orthodox church. In this discussion Campbell developed fully the doctrine of "baptism for the remission of sins." McCalla had much to say regarding the dangers both to the one being baptized and also to the administrator. This argument greatly amused the audience when it observed that McCalla's moderator, a Mr. Birch, was a small sickly person, while Mr. Vardeman, Campbell's moderator, was a magnificent specimen six feet in height and weighing over 300 pounds. Campbell's arguments were much more convincing, and the McCalla debate marked the beginning of the Restoration movement in Kentucky.

A few years later, a gentleman standing on the steps of a church building in Paris, Kentucky (a town halfway between Lexington and Washington), said as he waved his right hand through the air, "Campbellism, bourbon whis-

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key, and dog fennel have taken over the blue grass state of Kentucky, and the first of this trinity will soon have captured the whole state.” Truly, the Restoration pleas had made a successful attack and invasion of the state of Kentucky.

CAMPBELL AND ROBERT OWEN

The third major debate by Alexander Campbell was with Robert Owen, a rich Scottish infidel who challenged the American preachers to discuss socialism. Owen’s socialism was an early form of communism in America. No minister in the country answered the skeptic’s call, so Alexander Campbell responded to the debate. The discussion was held in Cincinnati, Ohio, April 13-21, 1829. The heart of the discussion lay in the area of Christian evidences. Prior to the debate, Owen visited Campbell at Bethany to make preparation for the discussion. One evening while the two were strolling over the farm, they came to the family cemetery. Owen paused and said, “There is one advantage that I have over the Christian—I am not afraid to die, and if some few items of my business were settled, I would be perfectly willing to die at any moment.” Campbell replied, “You say you have no fear of death, but do you have any hope in death?” After a brief silence Owen answered, “No.” Campbell pointed to an ox standing nearby in the shade, whisking off flies, and said, “You are on the level with that brute. He has fed till he is satisfied, and there he stands in the shade, and has neither fear nor hope in death!” Mr. Owen blushed in confusion and did not reply.

It was in the debate with Robert Owen that Alexander gave his famous twelve hour speech. Actually the address

was a succession of two hour speeches from ten to twelve and from two to four on three successive days. This is the second longest speech recorded, as an Austrian senator is said to have the longest speech on record. Robert Richardson, Campbell’s biographer, wrote, “for cogency of argument, comprehensive reach of thought and eloquence, he has never been surpassed, if ever equaled.” When the remarkable speech ended, a thoughtful hearer, not in sympathy with Campbell, said, “I have been listening to a man who has been living in all ages.”

Space will not allow the arguments of the debate to be presented. Campbell did inform Owen that “there was nothing in the social system worth a fig, there was not an unblushing plagiarism from Christian enterprises.” Owen attempted to divert the thought in one session by a pun, when he stated, “My friends, you have heard those wonderful stories. If you can come away with them all you are able to swallow, indeed, a camel (Campbell).” Owen had bought thirty thousand acres of land in Indiana to start a communal type of settlement. He called the place New Harmony and predicted that within three years, Cincinnati would be a vacant city, while New Harmony would be heavily populated. Campbell reminded Owen that he was indeed a poor prophet, as New Harmony never really got off the ground. At the conclusion of the debate, Campbell requested all who favored Christianity to stand. All but three stood. The discussion was a success in that it checked the rising tide of agnosticism and encouraged the friends of Christ. Mr. Owen soon abandoned his socialistic schemes in America and returned to Scotland.

—Deceased