

## **Bible Miracles**

"You must develop a nose like a bloodhound for those steps in the argument which depend not on historical and linguistic knowledge but on the concealed assumption that miracles are impossible, improbable, or improper" (C. S. Lewis).

Did the Lord cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead? Did the miracles in Bible times take place in time and space or are they myths to illustrate a truth? Should we as well-educated, twentieth-century people still take Biblical miracles seriously?

Harry Emerson Fosdick remarked rather unkindly: "To suppose that a man in order to be a loyal and devout disciple of our Lord in the twentieth century A.D. must think that God in the ninth century B.C. miraculously sent bears to eat unruly children or made an axe-head swim seems to me dangerously ridiculous. Folk who insist on that kind of literal inerrancy in ancient documents are not Fundamentalists at all; they are incidentals." Perhaps a Bible without the miraculous would be easier to believe; but it would not be worth believing. Non-miraculous Christianity simply does not exist.

### **Miracles not abnormal**

What is abnormal about miracles? Sin, disease, sorrow and death are abnormal in an ideal world, but the miraculous is not. If we believe in a personal, self-existent, almighty God who created the heavens and the earth, we have admitted that we believe in the supernatural, which in turn makes belief in miracles, inspiration and revelation rather easy.

The miracles in Bible times are inseparably connected with periods in which God revealed His plan and will for His people. Throughout Bible history you'll find that God used the miraculous to deliver His people, to accredit a message or a messenger. Miracles demonstrate the divinity of Christ and the crucial importance of the message He came to deliver. They declare the power of the living Lord over all things. If the Bible miracles were not factual, why should we accept the prophecies that tell us that Christ is to come again in a visible form, that the untold millions that have peopled the earth are to be resurrected and that at the end of history stands the judgment seat of Christ at which shall be assigned their eternal destinies? The specific eschatological events are steeped in the atmosphere of the supernatural. As Dr. Geerhardus Vos remarked: ". . . eschatology is supernaturalism in the ninth degree."

### **Higher critic vs. the Christian**

Why are there problems with the historical reality of miracles? What separates the Christian and the higher critic? It is not the fact of Scripture, but two different philosophies of reality. The result of the investigation of the historicity of miracles depends on the philosophical views that are held even before we begin to look at evidence.

Modern theology views miracles to be unthinkable, and thus excluded from the historical method of treatment. Ever since Hume's (1711-1776) famous Essay on Miracles, religious liberals have refused to believe in any such interference with the order of natural law. David Hume defined a miracle as a "violation of the laws of nature" or "a transgression" of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interpretation of some invisible agent. "It is impossible to prove a miracle." Belief is founded on experience. We have had no experience of the "transgression" of natural laws. We have had experience of the falsehood of testimony.

In dogmatic theology, Wegscheider (1771-1848) believed in a high providential mission of Jesus, but resolved the miracles into mistakes of witnesses and reporters. David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) undertook to show that the narratives of the miracles in the New Testament are myths-unconscious embodiments of the idea of the Messiah that was cherished in early communities of disciples cut off from the corrective guidance of the Apostles. Ritschl (1821-1889) considered the word miracles as a religious name for an event which awakens in us a powerful impression of the help of God, but is not to be held as interfering with the scientific doctrine of the unbroken connection of nature. The Unitarian Theodore Parker in 1841 delivered an address on "The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity" in which the New Testament narratives of miracles were pronounced to be myths. In 1842 he set forth his opinions more fully in a volume entitled *Discourse of Matters pertaining to Religion*. Miracles were relegated by Parker to the transient in Christianity. Parker didn't recognize the possibility of supernatural revelation and his basis was the intuitive experiences of the human spirit. Bernard E. Meland in his work *The Open Court* (1931) believed that Jesus must be seen against the background of historical relationships. Talmud, church and theology have put their stamp on the traditions. Our experiences are different. The clock cannot be set back.

### **Miracles viewed as time-bound**

Many theologians cannot accept the miraculous in the Bible. The biblical data are considered to be in disagreement with the reality of science as the Bible presupposes a supernatural, metaphysical world that basically can neither be recognized nor embraced by modern man. How then do we explain the miraculous? Modern theology, which is not so modern actually, views miracles as time-bound. In ancient times people thought mythologically, and thus miracles are aids to faith but have no content as such. The view is that in the New Testament times wonder-works were common. "In Greece the god Asclepius was credited with endless feats of healing, and the inscriptions discovered in the ruins of the Asclepieion at Athens or of the temple of Epidauras in Argolis give long lists of marvelous cures. The wonder-works attributed to Apollonius of Tyana (born about 4 B.C.) by his biographer, Philostratus, are so strikingly like those attributed to Jesus, that the similarity was once widely ascribed to conscious intent, but now is understood to be the reflection of an all but universal way of thinking. As for Palestine, both the Talmud and Midrash describe typical miracles performed by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai and his disciple, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, magicians like Elymas. Modernism sounds so reasonable, but as C. S. Lewis remarked: ". . . when you turn from the New Testament to modern scholars, remember that you go among them

as sheep among wolves." How true! The "new" theology's concept of miracles is a result of an alien view of Scripture. Harry Emerson Fosdick says: "By the time the Fourth Gospel was written, however, not only was Lazarus, entombed four days, revived by a word of Jesus, but the miracles in general had moved into the center of the church's picture of him, and were used as proof of his divinity. Even in recording Jesus' attack on his generation for demanding a sign, Matthew interpolates a saying, unknown to Mark and Luke, comparing Jonah's deliverance from the sea-monster with Christ's resurrection from the dead – a comparison alien to the argument and almost certainly not a saying of Jesus himself, but a reflection of the post-resurrection church."

### **Bultmann's view**

Rudolf Bultmann has become famous for his "demythologizing" of the miraculous content of the New Testament. Bultmann scorns all philosophy as culture bound and transitory, but nonetheless exempts existentialism, as his theology is strongly influenced by Heidegger.

Bultmann's approach is both naturalistic (denies miracles) and existentialistic (denies objectivity) with respect to Biblical history. He wanted to accommodate Christianity to the modern scientific mind but has not succeeded. But he has been successful in diverting more theologians from biblical Christianity than he has won scientists to the Christian faith.

### **Kuitert's view**

Dr. H. Kuitert, whose ideas have caused much concern, is not free either from philosophical influences. Though he cannot follow Bultmann or Tillich, he still claims that there is a great deal of truth in what Bultmann says. According to Kuitert the apostolic witness comes to us in the forms of expression of a culture that is no longer ours. The Bible is filled with images and stories that are completely embedded in a particular period of time and not in ours.

Kuitert asserts that it has become impossible to hold on to a literal interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis. We can no longer assume that every thing in the Bible happened precisely as it is recorded. He stresses the "time-boundness" of the biblical writers. What are the consequences of this approach? Kuitert's methodology can only lead to an empty Christ, to a faith without a foundation, and to a Bible without any authority.

### **Miracles as historical realities**

Miracles must be accepted as historical realities. They cannot be rejected without destroying the credibility of the entire biblical record. The gospel is dependent on historical facts. If we don't accept the historical account as factually reliable, we will lose not only the facts but the message of Scripture as well.

Consider the Incarnation! The very fact that Christ came to earth is due to a supernatural act of God. The one intervention of God in history that underlies all others is the incarnation. Deny the supernatural in terms of the miraculous and the statement of John 3:16 does not make any sense. "When our Lord came down to earth He drew heaven with Him. The signs which accompanied His ministry were but trailing clouds of glory which He brought from heaven which is His home" (Dr. B. B. Warfield).

Another great fact in history is Christ's resurrection from the dead. Numerous people saw the risen Savior. Many witnessed to this fact. The fact of resurrection is crucial to the Christian faith. Deny the historicity of the resurrection and Christianity is a mere religion! "The most celebrated event in the New Testament is the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection enjoys this place of honor because it verifies Christ's victory over sin and death (Rom. 1:4). Certainly no event since the world began has been so fully proved by the concurrent testimonies of so many people. Therefore, if we entertain a view of history that excludes the resurrection of Christ, we do more than repudiate biblical history. We repudiate the very possibility of history, for other past events have less evidence in their favor" (Dr. Edward John Carnell).

### **Supporting pillars**

The miracles are an integral part of Scripture. It is nonsense to talk about a reliable, trustworthy Bible that is not factual in its historical records. The Christian faith is grounded in facts and events that happened in space and time. C. S. Lewis rightly said: "The accounts of the miracles in first-century Palestine are either lies, or legends, or history. And if all, or the most important, of the miracles are lies or legends, then the claim which Christianity has been making for the last two thousand years is simply false. No doubt it might even so contain noble sentiments and moral truths. So does Greek mythology; so does Norse. But that is quite a different affair."

Remove the miracles from the Bible and you have done away with all of its supporting pillars. Christianity would be meaningless if we would destroy the historicity of the acts of God wrought by His immediate power.

The Lord has spoken!  
Let all the earth be silent!

Johan D. Tangelder  
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