

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



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The Case for Bible Miracles

By Gene Burgett

One of the great challenges Christians face today is modernism. A modernist is someone who denies the miraculous element in the Bible. The problem is not that the modernist does not believe in God, for he does. The problem is not that the modernist does not claim to believe the Bible is, to some degree, the word of God. The modernist simply cannot accept the Bible accounts of miracles. Thus, the modernist finds himself in the difficult position of trying to find naturalistic explanations for what the Bible clearly portrays as a supernatural event.

Several years ago many newspapers carried the story of a scientist in the Middle East who had calculated how the parting of the Red Sea was explicable by natural circumstances. He theorized that a wind of a certain force, blowing in the same direction for a designated number of hours in one of the shallower areas of the Sea, could recede the waters sufficiently to allow the nation of Israel to cross on dry ground. His theory also accounted for the destruction of the pursuing Egyptian army by noting that, when the wind ceased, the water would return to its normal levels, thus drowning the Egyptian army.

This is but one example of how modernists treat all of the miracles of the Bible. It is sometimes said of Jesus' miracles of healing that no literal physical healing took place, but that our Lord's dynamic personality made people believe in themselves, thus they overcame their psychologically induced illnesses. What this amounts to is that Jesus healed what we call today "psychosomatic illnesses." Other miracles are explained by stating that the writers of the Bible "accommodated" themselves to the beliefs of their literary audience. Since people believed that Jesus literally performed miracles, then the Biblical authors incorporated this belief in their writings.

In fact, modernistic ideas have even been placed into some versions of the Bible. For example, in Isaiah 7:14 we have recorded a prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus. The text states, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (NKJ). The New Revised Standard Version (continuing the practice of the previous Revised Standard Version) removes the miraculous element from this Messianic prediction by translating Isaiah 7:14 in this fashion: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Notice that it is no longer a virgin having a child, but a young woman. Of course, there is nothing miraculous about a young woman having a baby. The defense offered for this translation is that the Hebrew does allow for the translation "young woman" as well as "virgin." It should be noted, however, that Matthew offered an inspired understanding of Isaiah 7:14 when he wrote, "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us'" (Mt. 1:23). Unlike the Hebrew, the translation "young woman" is not a viable alternative in the Greek. Thus, this is an example of the challenge that modernism presents to the Christian faith today. Modernists have become so bold as to place their doctrine into the very text of the Bible.

The intent of this article is to present a defense of Bible miracles. In this defense three things will be shown. First, it will be proven that some of the miracles of the Bible are of such a nature as to preclude the possibility of a natural explanation. Second, some implications of rejecting miracles in the Bible will be revealed. Third, it will be shown that belief in the miracles of the Bible is not irrational.

Inexplicable Miracles

Many of the miracles of the Bible were of such a nature as to eliminate any possibility of natural explanation. I suppose, for example, one could maintain that Jesus did not really calm a storm while He and the disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps, one might claim, the storm coincidentally subsided at the same time Jesus spoke the words, "Peace, be still."

However, consider the healing of the blind man in John 9. Can this incident be reasonably explained without a miracle? It could not have been a psychosomatic illness for the text specifically states that he was "blind from birth" (Jn. 9:1). The man was not specially selected by Jesus from "out of town" in order to deceive people into believing he had healed someone, for the man was well known in the community (Jn. 9:8-12). Even the Pharisees, those who were part of Jesus' greatest opposition, could not deny that a miracle had been done. Even after interrogating the man healed, as well as his parents, they could not provide a natural explanation for what was obviously a supernatural event (Jn. 9:18-34).

How does one explain the raising of Lazarus from the dead separate and apart from the supernatural (Jn. 11)? To claim Jesus used cardio pulmonary resuscitation will simply not do, since the Bible tells us that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days (Jn. 11:39). Some even feared there would be a horrible stench when the stone sealing the tomb was rolled away.

In fact, it is interesting to note that our Lord's enemies had many opportunities to investigate the miracles he performed. Yet, not one time did they ever deny that a miracle had taken place. They sometimes attributed Jesus' miracles to the power of the devil, but never did Jesus' detractors

deny the fact of a miracle. Why did not his enemies deny the veracity of Jesus' miracles? Quite simply, because the miracles were done under circumstances that made it impossible to reasonably deny a miracle had taken place.

There is a good reason why Jesus' miracles were so open to investigation. There is a reason why our Lord's miracles were often

done in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of natural explanations. Jesus' miracles were designed to provide evidence of his deity. John 20:30-31 states,

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

This passage also answers one of the biggest objections raised by those who deny the miraculous element of the Bible—why are there not miracles today? The answer lies in the purpose of miracles. In Jesus' case the purpose of miracles was to confirm his claim of divine origin. The miracles of the apostles and inspired teachers confirmed the divine origin of their messages. We now have the Bible, a reliable record of those miracles, thus the need to continually perform miracles is no longer necessary.

Implications of Denying The Miraculous

When one begins to deny the possibility of miracles, one needs to be aware of the implications of his doctrine. Let us note a few matters implied by modernism. First, to deny the possibility of miracles is to impugn the integrity of the human authors of the Bible. We often hear those who deny the miracles of the Bible mention how the writers of the Bible wrote in an accommodative sense. Since people of their day believed in miracles, and specifically they believed Jesus performed miracles, they simply utilized this accepted superstition in their writings. There is a word for this where I come from—lying. The word "accommodate" sounds nice, but it really amounts to nothing more than lying.

Second, to deny Bible miracles also impugns the character of Jesus Himself. Jesus obviously encouraged people to believe He performed miracles. If Jesus did not perform these miracles, then He was a deceiver. This creates a real problem for the modernist. A modernist is not an atheist. He believes in the moral goodness of Jesus and the human authors of the Bible; he simply has a philosophical problem believing in the supernatural. However, one cannot have it both ways. One cannot maintain that Jesus and His disciples were morally good, if they were practicing blatant deception with regard to the miracles they claimed to perform.

Third, to deny the supernatural is to deny the Bible is in any way a revelation from God. It is amazing how a person can deny the miracles of the Bible, then state his belief that the Bible is, to some degree, a revelation from God. True, the modernist does not believe the Bible is the verbally inspired, inerrant word of God. However, many modernists do believe the Bible is inspired to some degree. Can these not see that, if God inspires the Bible

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at all, such would be miraculous? To write by divine inspiration to any degree is miraculous. To deny the possibility of miracles implies that the Bible is just another book. If this is the case, the Bible is deserving of no greater allegiance than one might give to any other moral standard.

Fourth, to deny the possibility of miracles is to make the entire Christian religion worthless. In First Corinthians 15:17, Paul writes, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." To deny the miraculous element of the Bible is to deny the resurrection of Jesus, the greatest miracle recorded in the Bible. The credibility of Christianity stands or falls on one event: the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then, in the words of Paul, "If the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Cor. 15:32). It is foolish to attempt to live one's life according to the dictates of Biblical morality, when one does not believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Yet, interestingly enough, many deny this miracle. Some claim that the Biblical doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus merely referred to the resurrection of a cause, but not to a bodily resurrection. According to Paul, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Are Miracles Rational?

Is it rational to believe in the miracles of the Bible? Many say, "No." Many teach that we should only believe in those things we have witnessed, and since we only have the word of those who wrote the Bible, then it is irrational to accept the miracles they claim took place.

The period known as the Enlightenment, with its reliance on the scientific method, made it somewhat popular to reject miracles because the individual did not have empirical evidence for them. In other words, no one living today has seen a miracle; therefore, it is irrational to believe miracles actually took place. For example, the philosopher David Hume (1711-1776) wrote, "Our ideas reach no further than our experience" (quoted by Stumpf and Fieser 250). Hume, like many of his day, believed the scientific method contained the solution to most world problems. Eventually, he even doubted the scientific method, as he doubted one could really even know things empirically experienced once the experience became merely a memory.

I bring up David Hume because in him we learn that to doubt the possibility of miracles is a presupposition on the part of the skeptic. It is not that the doubter has read the Bible, then concludes, based on the evidence, that the miracles recounted in the Bible are false. Those who reject miracles have predetermined there can be no miracles before even reading the first inspired word.

It should be understood that each of us believes in many things we have not personally witnessed. Many men of great learning deny the Bible because they cannot accept the miraculous, yet they believe we exist because inanimate matter evolved into life. Has anyone ever seen non-life produce life? Has anyone ever witnessed the evolution of a new life form from another totally unrelated life form? Of course not. If an evolutionary scientist had witnessed either of these events we can believe they would be parading it around as proof of the General Theory of Evolution. Despite the fact that no one has ever witnessed the evolution of man, many say it is a fact.

Second, belief in miracles is as rational as belief in God Himself. Belief in God is not irrational. The modernist, who denies the miracles of the Bible, does not deny the existence of God. If one admits to the existence of a supernatural being, why is it so difficult to accept supernatural events? Surely if God, a supernatural being, exists, he has the ability to supernaturally intervene in the affairs of this world.

Conclusion

The Bible is not a book that we can pick and choose the elements we accept as credible. The Bible demands to be read and accepted as a whole. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). To reject miracles, while accepting other parts of the Bible, is to treat the word as if some Scripture is given by inspiration of God. This is not a view the Bible writers made available. 

Works Cited

Stumpf, Samuel Enoch and James Fieser. *Philosophy: History and Problems*. New York: McGraw and Hill, 2008.

Thanks for Your Prayers

As many readers know by now, my wife, Amber, has been diagnosed with a very advanced and aggressive form of cancer that has spread through her body. At the time of this printing, she was completing radiation treatment and was to begin chemo therapy the week of March 8. We appreciate all the prayers, visits, and cards. The Christian love and concern expressed, even by those whom we have not met, is overwhelming and quite encouraging. We take comfort in the fact that many prayers are being offered and that God always answers the prayers of His faithful according to His will (1 Jn. 5:14-15). Therefore, whatever happens, we know it is the absolute best according to His will. We serve an awesome God! Thanks for praying —Brian

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We are pleased to announce that due to your sacrificial generosity we have "broken even" on our 2010 lectureship expenses. This blessing further illustrates our need for generous supporters who sacrificially give to help us do God's work of training men to preach and better preparing souls to serve the Lord (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:2). Though we know that God will always provide a way for good works to continue according to His will, we also know the key role that our supporters have in continuing this great work. If you are not a regular supporter of the school and would like to be, please contact us. We need and appreciate your help. Your support is key to our success!

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