

DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES?

Introduction

Is it reasonable to believe in miracles? Skeptics question the credibility of any miracle claim. Many hold to a naturalistic worldview and believe that since we live in a closed system, the laws of nature are constant and cannot be violated. Therefore, there can be no such thing as a miracle. Christians however, believe that miracles, specifically the miraculous life of Christ and the resurrection, confirm Christianity to be true. Can miracle accounts be substantiated? Did they actually happen? In the following article we will investigate, the definition of a miracle, the purpose of miracles, and the possibility of miracles happening.

What is a Miracle?

Some say the birth of a baby is a miracle or every sunset is a miracle. Many have even jokingly commented that my college graduation is a miracle. Although these events are special, they should not be considered miracles. Rather, these are examples of God working through the natural order of creation or the laws of nature that He has set in place.

A miracle, on the other hand, can be defined as an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that He is acting.¹ Dr. Norman Geisler defines a miracle as a “divine intervention into or an interruption of the regular course of the world that produces a purposeful but unusual event that would not have occurred otherwise.”² A miracle is a special act of God that interrupts the natural course of events. Miracles are unusual, irregular, and specific acts of God.

There are three words associated with miracles in the Bible: powers, signs, and wonders. “Power” is used in the Bible to emphasize the divine energizing of a miraculous event.³ God is the force behind the miracle.

“Signs” means an unusual occurrence transcending the common course of nature.⁴ Signs stand out from the ordinary course of events to convey a message. For example, conspicuous traffic signs help people to easily notice symbols and information related to driving. A red, octagonal sign tells the driver to stop. Signs are also temporary. Once the message is given, its purpose is accomplished and it does not need to continually appear over and over again. Continuing with our example, once the driver brakes at the stop sign and checks the intersection, he can proceed on. The stop sign does not continue

¹ Douglas Geivett and Gary Habbermas, *In Defense of Miracles*, (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 62-63.

² Norman Geisler, *When Skeptics Ask*, (Wheaton, IL.: Victor Books, 1989), 76.

³ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1999), 482.

⁴ James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Ontario, CA.: Woodside Fellowship, 1996), G4592.

to follow the car. Once the sign is given, it has accomplished its purpose. In the Bible, miracles are signs telling observers that God is acting in history.

“Wonders” refer to strange events that cause the beholder to marvel.⁵ Wonders trigger others to pay attention. Miracles are unusual events designed to capture the audience’s attention and draw them to a realization that God is moving in history and sending a message that calls for a response.

Miracles are an exception to the normal course of events in nature and are thus considered extraordinary. The birth of a child or a sunset is a special event but they are not exceptions to the regular events found in nature.

Miracles are also supernatural in that only someone outside of this universe can be responsible for them. For example, in John 14, it was natural for Lazarus to die from illness but it was supernatural for him to be raised from the dead after several days.

Miracles have the fingerprint of God on them. They are the result of a God who is beyond the universe and possesses the ability to intervene in history. In Exodus 8:19 the Egyptian magicians had to admit the miracles Moses performed were indeed achieved by “. . . the finger of God.”

Finally, miracles have a moral dimension. They bring glory to God and manifest his righteous character. No act of God is evil or contrary to His nature. God will not confirm what is false.

The Purpose of Miracles

God performs miracles with a definite purpose in mind. He does not use them for entertainment purposes nor does He carry them out to those whose hearts have been proven to be resistant to His message. In Matthew 12, the Jewish leaders ask Jesus to perform a miracle for them. Jesus would not answer their challenge with a miracle for He knew their hearts were hardened and they would not listen to His message even if He performed a miracle there. He had done several miracles already and they still did not believe. He tells the Pharisees the only sign they will be given is the sign of Jonah, which was a prophecy of His death and resurrection.

The purpose of miracles is to confirm God’s message and His messenger. The three major monotheistic religions affirm that miracles confirm a messenger of God. In the Old Testament, God confirmed His prophets with miracles. God used miracles to assure the Israelites Moses’ call as a prophet of God (Exodus 4). In 1 Kings 18, God confirmed Elijah and his message with miracles.

God also confirmed Jesus and the Apostles with miracles. Miracles reinforced the Messianic claims of Christ. In Luke 7, when John’s disciples questioned Jesus, He authenticated his messianic qualifications with His record of miracles. In John 3:1-2, Nicodemus saw Jesus as a prophet because of His miracles. When Peter addressed the crowd in Jerusalem at Pentecost, he pointed to the miracles of Christ as confirmation that Jesus was indeed the Messiah (Acts 2:22).

Miracles also validated the Apostles authority and message. In Acts 2:43, the crowds were amazed at the miracles the Apostles performed and as a result, many came

⁵ W.E. Vine, *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 228.

to believe their message. Hebrews 2 states that God confirmed Jesus and the Apostles through miracles (Hebrews 2:3-4).

The Koran, the holy book of Islam also states that miracles confirm the divine calling of a prophet. Sura 4:63-65 states that God's power is manifest through the miraculous works of the prophets. Throughout the Koran the people ask Muhammad to perform a miracle but he refuses. The only miracle he points to is the Koran (3:181-184, 4:153, 6:8-9). However the Koran teaches that the Old Testament prophets Moses and Elijah performed miracles (23:45, 7:100-108, 116-119). It even teaches that Jesus did miracles (5:113). In the Koran, Jesus and the Old Testament prophets are confirmed by miracles whereas Muhammad does not have a testimony of executing miracles.

Possibility of Miracles

Are miracles possible? The answer lies in the fact that if God exists, then miracles are possible. There is strong evidence to indicate that we live in a theistic universe. The first proof is the argument from first cause, also known as the cosmological argument, which states, "Whatever begins to exist has a cause." The scientific evidence shows that the universe has a beginning and therefore, it must have a cause. It is illogical to assume that the universe was created out of nothing. What initiated the creation of the universe? It must have been someone or something greater than the universe to create the universe. It is reasonable to conclude this cause to be God who is intelligent, eternal, and greater than the universe.

Secondly, the apparent order and design in nature points to an intelligent designer. For example, none of us would assume that a computer was created as the result of natural forces. Although all the components of a computer can be found on earth, we would never assume the wind, rain, and lightning somehow produced something so complex and sophisticated as a computer. If we can arrive at the conclusion that a computer could not have possibly come about by chance, how much more can we similarly deduce that the human brain, which is even more complex, did not randomly come into being? Apparent design can be found in all arenas of creation. Complexity and design point to an intelligent designer.

Thirdly, we have our moral intuition. We inherently know right from wrong. All people recognize that it is wrong to torture and murder a child for entertainment. All people acknowledge that rape is wrong. This universal moral law embedded in the hearts of all people points to a moral lawgiver who established a moral law code and placed it in the conscience of every individual. This moral lawgiver is God. (For a more expanded treatment, refer to the article entitled, "Proofs for the Existence of God," which can be found at www.evidenceandanswers.com).

If God exists then miracles are not only possible, but they are actual. This is exemplified by the fact that the greatest miracle has occurred, God created the universe out of nothing. If there is a God who acts, then there can be acts of God. Moreover, if this miracle has already taken place, it is also reasonable to ask when else has God acted in human history?

The Gospels

The Bible presents an accurate historical record of God's work in history. Since examining the evidence for the Bible would be a very extensive work, I will focus on the Gospels which record the life of Jesus. (For further reference, see the article "Authority of the Bible" which can be found at evidenceandanswers.com). The Gospels have proven to be an accurate historical account. There is strong evidence to show that eyewitnesses precisely recorded the events of Christ's life. (For more in-depth discussion, read the article, "Gospels: History or Myth" at www.evidenceandanswers.com).

There are ancient manuscripts of the Gospels that date from the early second century A.D.. Since these are ancient copies, we can conclude the originals were completed within the first century A.D.. The ancient church fathers from the late first century to the third century quoted most of the New Testament. Fathers like Clement of Rome, who lived in the first century, quoted the first three Gospels as Scripture. This is strong proof that the Gospels were written and circulating in the first century.

There is also non-Christian historical works from the first through third century that corroborate the facts of the Gospels. First century historians Josephus and Thallus along with early second century Roman historians Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, and Suetonius corroborate events, and characters mentioned in the Gospels.

This early evidence shows that eyewitnesses were alive when the gospels were circulating and could attest to their accuracy. Apostles often appealed to the witness of the hostile crowd pointing out their knowledge of the facts as well (Acts 2:22, Acts 26:26). Therefore, if there were any exaggerations or stories being told about Christ that were not true, the eyewitnesses could have easily discredited the Apostles accounts. We must also remember that the preaching of the Apostles began in Israel and specifically in Jerusalem, in the very cities where the eyewitnesses were present. The Jews were careful to record accurate historical accounts. Many enemies of the early church were looking for ways to discredit the Apostles' teaching. If what the Apostles were saying proved false, the enemies would have cried foul and the Gospels would not have earned much credibility.

There are also hostile witnesses and non-Christian sources that attest to the miracles of Christ. Historians acknowledge that positive evidence from a hostile source is one of the strongest kinds of evidence. In the gospels, the enemies of Christ do not deny the fact that He did indeed perform a miracle. Instead, they present alternative explanations for them (Matthew 12:24 & 28:11-15). Jewish historian Josephus who recorded the history of the Roman Empire in the first century A.D. writes, "Now there was about that time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles." The Jewish Talmud written in the fifth century A.D., record that Jesus performed powerful deeds but attributes His miracles to sorcery. Thus opponents of the Gospels do not deny the miracles of Christ, but instead, they attempt to present alternative explanations for them.

Conclusion

Miracles are supernatural acts of God that interrupt the natural course of events. It is reasonable to believe in miracles because God who created the universe exists. The evidence for His existence is substantial. Since there is a God who can act in history,

there can be acts of God. The record of His intervention in history has been accurately recorded in the Bible. We can believe these miracles are historical because the Bible is an accurate historical document. The Gospels in particular have been proven to be very credible. The early dating of the Gospels, the fact that we have multiple written sources, and the testimony of hostile witnesses all uphold the events recorded in the Gospels. The evidence then, clearly indicates we can believe in miracles.