

The Bible Verifiable by Miracles

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION

Some people think miracles are one of the greatest obstacles to believing the Bible. But actually they are one of the greatest verifications of its being the Word of God.

A. The Definition of Miracles

It's important to have an accurate definition of miracle because the word is used so loosely today. For example, someone explaining that a car sped through a red light and barely missed him might add that it was a miracle he wasn't hit. When someone in need receives an unexpected check in the mail, he might call that a miracle. Some Christians have the regrettable habit of calling anything unusual or not readily explainable as a miracle.

A miracle is what occurs when God supernaturally acts in the natural world. That definition acknowledges two concepts: (1) that we live in the natural world, and (2) the supernatural world is outside ours. Think of our world as a box. Everything inside our box is governed by God in regular patterns we call natural law. God is outside the box but occasionally reaches in. A miracle is God's intervening in the normal laws of nature to do a supernatural act.

B. The Design of a Miracle

The New Testament describes miracles in three terms: signs, wonders, and mighty works (e.g., Heb. 2:4--"signs and wonders, and...diverse miracles" [Gk., *dunamis*, "power" or "mighty work"]). They were mighty works that created wonder in those who witnessed them. Miracles were not an end in themselves but acted as signs pointing outside the natural realm. They were designed by God to show us there's a supernatural world.

C. A Deduction about Miracles

If there were no God, all miracles would be impossible because there would be no supernatural catalyst to affect the natural world. However one would be faced with great difficulty in explaining the existence of our universe. And two of the main theories proposed, the steady-state theory and the big-bang theory, contradict the laws of thermodynamics. A team of scientists wrote, "The Second Law requires the universe to have had a beginning; the First Law precludes it having begun itself. The only possible reconciliation of this problem is that the universe was created by a Cause transcendent to itself" (Scientific Creationism, Henry M. Morris, ed. [San Diego: Creation-Life, 1974], p. 26). So if God created the universe, the greatest miracle of all, then it's logical to believe He could do other miracles as well.

Note that it is logically inconsistent to accept the Bible as the Word of God and reject miracles. It's like saying, "God, You can exist, but You can't do anything." That's why it amazes me that some theologians want to strip the Bible of its miracles. If we believe in God, we have to let Him act. One reason we know the Bible is God's revelation is that it contains miracles. The Book that reveals God must contain miracles because God's revelation is a miracle--a supernatural inroad into the natural world.

D. The Distinctiveness of Miracles

1. They are perceivable

A secret miracle wouldn't point to God. For a miracle to be legitimate, it must be perceivable by the senses and attested by witnesses.

2. They are unquestionable

A miracle must transcend natural law in such a way that the only explanation is that it was an act of God.

3. They are purposeful

All genuine miracles have a divine purpose. God isn't a magician who performs tricks to entertain people. In fact, Jesus deliberately avoided making such an impression (e.g., Matt. 12:38-41; Luke 23:8-11). God doesn't work miracles to appeal to human curiosity but to reveal Himself to us.

The Bible proves its authenticity by the character of its miracles.

LESSON

I. MIRACLES THAT AFFECTED ALL MANKIND

A. The Creation

1. Delineated

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The Bible begins with the assumption that God exists, because a knowledge of Him is within every man (Rom. 1:19-20). Scripture never attempts to prove the existence of God. His existence is not a theory to be proven but a fact to be affirmed. When an atheist tells me he doesn't believe in God, I tell him I do believe in Him and that the Bible affirms His existence. The atheist must prove that God doesn't to make his position tenable, but that is impossible. (Hopefully he will be open to examining the biblical evidence.)

Once a person accepts the first sentence in the Bible, no other miracle should trouble him. The

Hebrew word translated "created" (bara) means "to make out of nothing." If you believe God made everything out of nothing, no other miracle will be difficult to accept. Creation is certainly the greatest miracle in terms of volume. One day God stepped out on the edge of nothing and made everything by His Word alone-- that's a miracle! (cf., Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3).

In Genesis 1 the Holy Spirit describes in simple language what happened.

a) A formless earth

Genesis 1:2 says, "The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." God created the earth, but it was formless and empty.

b) A formed earth

The account continues, "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.... And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.... And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.... And God said, Let the earth bring forth vegetation, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so" (Gen. 1:3, 6-7, 9, 11). Note that God put water upon the earth and above the earth. The earth was covered with a canopy of vapor, which filtered out the sun's harmful rays. That explains why men lived so long then; for example Adam and Methuselah both lived over 900 years. It also explains why there were such large animals and plants. The canopy had a greenhouse effect (see Morris, *Scientific Creationism*, pp. 124-25, 211).

c) A full earth

Genesis 1 says, "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.... And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.... And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after its kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after its kind: and it was so" (Gen. 1:14-15, 20, 24). Here is the fullness: light turns into luminaries, the air is filled with birds, the water is filled with fish, and the land is populated with animals and man (vv. 26-27). Genesis 1 is a beautiful, detailed description of creation.

2. Defended

Some people think the biblical creation account is a myth. But no one has ever proved that the Genesis account contains scientific errors. Scientist William B. Dawson maintains that the creation account Moses recorded in Genesis harmonizes so closely with the results of modern scientific investigations that its accuracy is unquestionable (*The Bible Confirmed by Science* [London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1936], pp. 77-79). Qualified scientists have said that what is written in Genesis fits the facts.

a) The question of the earth's age

Some scientists reject the Bible's claim that creation happened in six days because they hold to the geological age system. They believe that creation took place over billions of years. Unfortunately, some Christians automatically assume they're right without checking the facts and cling to the theories of theistic evolution or progressive creationism. They claim to believe the Genesis account but deny that the days of creation were actual days, arguing instead that each day represents millions of years.

However, God communicated exactly what He meant to. Exodus 20:11 says, "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." The Jewish sabbath was not a million-year period but an actual solar day. Just as God created everything in six days and rested on the seventh, so the Israelites were to work six days and rest on the seventh. The parallel is obvious, and the miracle clear. (For additional discussion on the literal meaning of "day," see Scientific Creationism, pp. 223-26.)

Is Creation Verifiable?

How can creation be verified? Look at yourself; look up; look around you ! It is obvious that someone created what you see. If you were to take your watch completely apart and put all those intricate pieces in your pocket, how long would you have to shake it before you heard a tick? It would never happen by accident. An expert would have to use his intelligence to put it back together. The same is true of the world. It's absurd to think that everything we see happened by accident.

b) The question of the earth's population

In More Infallible Proofs Dr. Henry Morris demonstrates that a careful examination of the world's population provides more insight into the earth's beginnings. When he compiled his statistics, there were 3.5 billion people in the world. (As of July, 1987 there were 5 billion according to the Time magazine issued on the 20th of that month [p. 51].) Assuming the uniformitarian view of evolution and the current growth rate of about two percent, he showed that reaching a population of 3.5 billion required only 1100 years. Assuming that because of disease and other dangers, the past growth rate was only one-half of one-percent, it would have taken only 4300 years to reach 3.5 billion. It is obvious that evolution is completely out of step with the facts. If the population were to grow at one-half of one- percent for one million years (one-third of the time most evolutionists suggest for man's development), there would be 102155 people--"the impossibility of such a number is pointed up by noting there are only about 1080 electrons in the entire universe!" ([San Diego: Creation-Life, 1974], pp. 296-97).

B. The Flood

1. Delineated

Genesis 7:1-2 says, "The Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation. Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female; and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female." Some people have questioned how Noah could herd all those animals into an ark. But that's no problem for the God who made them. In fact, God has less trouble with animals than with people. Isaiah 1:3 says, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass, his master's crib, but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider." God simply had the animals go into the ark. Then beginning in Genesis 7:11, God broke up the fountains under the earth and water surged up. And He dispersed the firmament above the earth, causing rain for forty days. The canopy of vapor that protected the earth from the sun's harmful rays was eliminated, which immediately shortened man's life span.

2. Defended

The Flood explains the fossil record as it is. The theory of evolution does not. Uniformitarianism is the view that the fossils and other features of the earth's crust formed slowly over vast periods of

time. Catastrophism is the view that they were formed rapidly in a relatively short period of time by some great catastrophe, like the Flood. In Fossils paleontologists Rhodes, Zim, and Shaffer say, "To become fossilized a plant or animal must usually have hard parts, such as bone, shell or wood. It must be buried quickly to prevent decay and must be undisturbed throughout the long process" ([New York: Golden Press, 1962], p. 10). That demands a rapid catastrophe.

The Flood was a worldwide catastrophe; it wasn't localized. Since water, which seeks its own level, covered Mount Ararat, the Flood had to have covered the entire world. In 2 Peter 3:5-6 Peter speaks of "the world that then was, being overflowed with water." In addition, there are accounts of a great flood in almost every part of the world--even where people have never had access to a Bible. So the fossils and various flood accounts all corroborate the biblical record.

C. The Tower of Babel

Genesis 11 says, "The whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Come, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Come, let us build a city and a tower [probably a ziggurat--a tower used in worshiping false gods], whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make for ourselves a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.... And the Lord said, Behold, the people are one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be withheld from them, which they have imagined to do. Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth: and they ceased building the city. Therefore, is the name of it called Babel, because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth; and from there did the Lord scatter them abroad upon all the face of all the earth" (Gen. 11:1-4, 6-9). God caused them to speak in different languages and scattered them all over the world. That incident is a responsible explanation of the origin of the world's languages; without it the one original language would have continued with only slight variations. The earliest historical records show the existence of vastly different and highly complex languages.

II. MIRACLES THAT AFFECTED NATIONS

A. The Parting of the Red Sea

The crossing of the Red Sea was a miracle with no natural explanation, witnessed by two different nations. Creation revealed God as Creator; the Flood revealed God as Savior; Babel revealed God as Judge. At the Red Sea God revealed Himself again as Deliver and Judge--He delivered Israel and judged the Egyptians.

1. Delineated

Exodus 14:13-28 gives us the account: "Moses said unto the people, Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord which he will show to you today; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward; but lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them; and I will get me honor over Pharaoh, and over all his host, over his chariots, and over his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.... And the angel of the Lord, who went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these, so that the one came not near the other all the night.

"And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily; so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea.... And the waters returned and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them." The only viable explanation for what happened there is that it was a miracle.

2. Defended

Some critics have attacked that account and offered their own explanation of what actually happened at the Red Sea. Between the north end of the Red Sea and an area called the Bitter Lakes was a shallow, marshy connection. They say a southeast wind blew up the channel holding the water in the Bitter Lakes, while the tide fell in the Red Sea. So the children of Israel waded through that marshy area in only two or three inches of water.

However, if the Israelites walked across a shallow, marshy area, how did the entire Egyptian army drown in two inches of water? Now that would have been an even greater miracle! If you believe God exists, let Him reveal Himself. Don't try to explain away His miracles.

B. The Provision of Manna

Exodus 16:14-22 tells us that when the children of Israel were in the wilderness, God provided them with manna, food He supernaturally created.

III. MIRACLES THAT AFFECTED INDIVIDUALS

A. Balaam

In Numbers 22 God worked a fascinating miracle to communicate with Balaam, a prophet who hired himself out to the highest bidder.

1. The encounter

Numbers 22:21-27 says, "Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field; and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. And the angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. And when the ass saw the angel of the Lord, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled and he smote the ass with a staff." Balaam had probably ridden the animal every day. Then suddenly she went crazy, veering from the path and smashing his foot against a wall. So he was certainly wondering what was wrong with her.

2. The exchange

Verses 28-30 continue, "The Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me, I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine unto this day? Was I ever accustomed to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay."

That episode makes me think God has a sense of humor. Who is going to believe that a donkey talked? Peter did. In 2 Peter 2:15-16 Peter wrote that some people had strayed and were "following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but was rebuked for his iniquity; the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbade the madness of the prophet." Peter is a credible witness who accepted that miracle.

Those who deny the miraculous have various explanations for what happened. Some say Balaam was in a trance (However, it would be difficult to be in a trance right after a donkey crushed your leg.) Others say that Balaam had a habit of talking to his animal and the witness mistook his talking for the animal's talking. Someone else even suggested that Balaam was so familiar with the donkey's braying, he interpreted its meaning. Let's see what the Scripture says.

3. The enlightenment

Numbers 22:31 says, "Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face." What astounds me most about this miracle is the total lack of defensiveness with which it is presented. If I were writing this down, I would introduce it with some statements to prepare the readers to hear something amazing. Moses--who was raised to the highest place in Pharaoh's court, who led several million people through the wilderness, who received God's law, who wrote the

Pentateuch with all its deep truths and great doctrines--without any self-consciousness, and without one defensive statement, gave account of a conversation with a donkey. But what else can one do with a real miracle?

B. Elisha

Second Kings 4:18-36 presents the story of the Shunammite woman's son: "When the child was grown, it fell on a day that he went out to his father to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died. And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God [Elisha], and shut the door upon him, and went out. And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore will thou go to him today? It is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well. Then she saddled the ass, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward; slacken not thy riding for me, except I bid thee. So she went and came unto the man of God to Mount Carmel. And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi, his servant, Behold, over there is that Shunammite. Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child? And she answered, It is well. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet; but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is bitter within her, and the Lord hath hidden it from me, and hath not told me. Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?

"Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand, and go thy way. If thou meet any man, greet him not; and if any greet thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child has not awakened. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and lay upon his bed. He went in, therefore, and shut the door upon the two of them, and prayed unto the Lord. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child became warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro, and went up, and stretched himself upon him; and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son."

Those who deny miracles claim that Elisha did mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. But the passage says twice that the boy was dead. God clearly performed a miracle of resurrection.

There are also a number of miracles recorded in the New Testament. In Acts 3 Peter and John healed a lame man (vv. 2-11). Peter and others were delivered from prison in Acts 5:19-23. Philip was transported from one location to another by the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:39). Paul healed a cripple (Acts 14:8-10), cast out evil spirits (Acts 16:16-18), healed the sick (Acts 19:11-12), and raised the dead (20:6-12).

The Bible is a book about God. It is a record of His acts. The miracles it contains help substantiate that. To reject the possibility of miracles is to reduce God to human dimensions and make Him

subject to our limitations. If there are no miracles, there is no divine revelation, salvation, or hope. But by a miracle of God's grace we have all of those.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Define miracle. What does the definition acknowledge?
2. What terms does the New Testament often use to describe a miracle?
3. What were miracles designed to show?
4. Explain why it is logically inconsistent to believe in God and reject the miraculous.
5. What are the characteristics of a genuine miracle?
6. Scripture never attempts to prove the _____ of God.
7. Define the Hebrew word bara.
8. What did God create that may explain why men like Methuselah lived so long?
9. Are the six days of creation actual solar days? Support your answer with Scripture.
10. How does the world's population support creationism?
11. Do fossils prove the biblical account of the Flood? Explain.
12. What New Testament verse reiterates that the Flood was global and not localized?
13. What does the Tower at Babel explain?
14. What is the critics' explanation of the crossing of the Red Sea? Why is it wrong?
15. What is most astounding about the miracle of Balaam's talking donkey? Explain.
16. To reject the possibility of miracles is to reduce God to _____ and make Him subject to our _____.

Pondering the Principles

1. In recent history man has attempted to divorce himself from the concept that he is a created being. However, when we consider the implications of accepting the fact that we were created, it's easy to understand why. If man was created, there must be a Creator. And the Creator-creature relationship has one overwhelming implication: ownership. Since we are created beings, we belong to God. But it is the next implication that is especially difficult for man: if we belong to God, we are obligated to do what He says. Ultimately, a Creator-creature relationship allows God sovereign control and demands our total obedience. So it shouldn't surprise us that sinful mankind grasps at any other possible explanations of his origin. Have you considered the implications of your being a created being? Have you recognized God's right to sovereignly control the circumstances of your life? Or are you bitter about what God has allowed to happen to you? Do you obey God's Word, or do you ignore it? Read Genesis 1-2, meditating on its truths and the implications for you.

2. Although the Bible is replete with incredible miracles, the writers never apologize for them. They simply state and affirm them. However, because believing in such miracles seems rather unsophisticated in our modern world, some Christians find themselves blushing about such biblical accounts as Jonah and the great fish or Balaam's talking donkey. Does knowing your neighbors and co-workers know you believe such things make you uncomfortable? Do you make excuses for the Bible when the subject arises? Read Job 38:1--42:6, noting how God demonstrates His power. Meditate on Job 42:1-6 and make it your prayer to God. Ask Him to forgive you for doubting His power and being embarrassed of His truth.

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