

The Miraculous Jesus

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INTRODUCTION

One of the evidences of the credibility of the Bible is the miracles it records because any book that is a revelation of God would have to contain miracles. That's because a supernatural God can disclose Himself to the natural world only by a supernatural act. If God exists, miracles must also exist, so we are not surprised to discover miracles in the Bible. It is not unreasonable to assume that God, who performed the miracle of creation, would occasionally perform other miracles when they fit His purposes.

A. Examining the Miracles of the Bible

1. In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament large sections of Scripture and many years elapse without any allusion to a miracle. In fact, there are only two periods in which miracles were normative: during the time of the Exodus and the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Other than those times, miracles occurred sporadically and were the exception rather than the rule in Old Testament history.

God performed miracles to reveal Himself, and He always performed them before witnesses. Miracles had to be perceivable by the senses, be obvious acts of God apart from any natural explanation, and have a redemptive purpose or moral message. Once those miracles were recorded, no more were needed except at special times when God chose to confirm His existence and His Word miraculously.

2. In the New Testament

a) The purpose of miracles

The New Testament records two more periods of miracles: the ministry of Jesus Christ and the beginnings of the church. When God disclosed Himself through Christ in the New Testament, He again confirmed His Word by miracles. They served to authenticate Christ and His apostles. So when the New Testament was complete, miracles were no longer necessary to confirm His Word. Second Corinthians 12:12 says, "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." Miracles were the signs of an apostle. Hebrews 2:4, speaking of the New Testament prophets and apostles, says that God bore "them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles." Miracles corroborated the message of the early preachers. When a man preached Jesus Christ and then worked miracles, people had evidence he was from God. Once the Spirit gave us a record of those miracles, their testimony was secured, so no more were necessary.

b) The progress of miracles

A study of the New Testament demonstrates that as time passed, miracles occurred less and less

frequently. They seem to fade away as the New Testament comes to a close. Once Scripture was complete, miracles were no longer the test of truth. Today we know whether a man speaks for God by comparing him and his message to the Word of God. In *Gifts of the Spirit* Ronald E. Baxter says miracles performed through the agency of man are not normative today because their primary purpose was to confirm the Word--a purpose that is no longer necessary ([Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1983], pp. 134-47).

Therefore modern miracle workers and healers are definitely suspect. Biblical miracles happened for a limited time, through a limited number of people, and for a limited purpose: to confirm revelation.

Do Miracles Happen Today?

Some of God's greatest miracles will occur in the future. For example, the next great miracle He will perform is called the rapture--Jesus Christ will take all Christians out of this natural world (cf., 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-17). The book of Revelation speaks of many miracles God will perform during the Great Tribulation. God can do miracles now also if He chooses to--He can supernaturally in response to prayer, and He continues to work the miracle of the new birth. But I don't believe He is presently working miracles through the agency of specific men or women. The gift of miracles has ceased.

Someone may disagree with me because of John 14:12, where Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father." Doesn't that verse indicate we will do what Jesus did?

However, I have never met anyone who performed the miracles Jesus did. Do you know anyone who can raise the dead, who knows everything that's in the heart of every person, who can call fish to the side of a boat, or who can walk on water? Obviously John 14:12 isn't saying we can do those things.

Jesus indeed promised His apostles that they would do greater things, not necessarily greater in power but in extent. Jesus was confined to a small geographical area. But the apostles and prophets ministered over all the known world. Jesus did many miracles, but the apostles were enabled to do even more. Christ's promise in John 14:12 was fulfilled in the rapid growth of the early church. And every time a person leads someone to Jesus Christ, he participates in a fantastic miracle.

B. Examining the Claim of Christ

The Person of Jesus Christ confirms that the Bible is the Word of God. No human genius, or committee of religious scholars could ever invent an individual like Him; He had to be God in human flesh. Just as God intended other miracles to authenticate His truth, He recorded the miraculous life of Jesus Christ to show us that He was God Himself in human flesh.

1. The claim expressed

John 5:18 says, "The Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." Certain non-Christian cults try to argue that Jesus was not equal with God, even though Jesus said He was. The Israelites

understood what He was claiming, and that claim is what angered them so much. In John 5:23 Jesus said "that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father, who hath sent him." That's equality!

2. The claim supported

In John 5 Jesus said, "There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true.... But I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (vv. 32, 36). The greatest testimony to His deity was the works He did. I know Jesus is God not because He claimed to be, but because He supported His claims. Jesus asserted that His works are sufficient proof of who He is. His miracles attest to His deity.

John 10:24-25 says, "Then came Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not; the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." In John 10:37-38 Jesus said, "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." Just as the Bible's miracles support its being the Word of God, Jesus' miracles are a vital witness for His being the living Word. So as Christians, we are unashamed of miracles.

In John 14:11 Jesus said, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake." No one can deny the things He did. Some people attempt to undermine the biblical account by pointing out that it's only a written record of what He did. But examine the witnesses of the record and read its history. The Bible is easily as credible as any other historical document (see chapter 6, p. XX). The evidence is in on who Jesus is.

Luke recorded what happened when messengers from John the Baptist came to Jesus: "When the men were come unto him, they said, John the Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus, answering, said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard--how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached." Jesus Himself repeatedly appealed to His miracles to prove His claims. Since those miracles are recorded in the Bible as perpetual evidence of His claims, modern miracles are unnecessary. Jesus quoted Abraham as saying, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

The Historical Impact of Jesus Christ

Historian Philip Schaff said, "The life and character of Jesus Christ is the holy of holies in the history of the world" (The Person of Christ [New York: American Tract Society, 1913], p. 1). Even skeptic H.G. Wells said, "When I was asked which single individual has left the most permanent impression on the world, the manner of the questioner almost carried the implication that it was Jesus of Nazareth. I agreed, Jesus stands first" (Reader's Digest [May, 1935], p. 12).

Schaff wrote, "This Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise, than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times" (pp. 29-30).

Everything about Jesus Christ was miraculous because He was God in human flesh. Let's examine Him more closely.

LESSON

I. HIS MIRACULOUS BIRTH

A. Delineated

1. Matthew 1:18-23--"The birth of Jesus Christ was in this way: When, as his mother, Mary, was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph, her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary, thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Isa. 7:14], saying, Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is God with us." Jesus is God with us.

2. Genesis 3:15--God said to the serpent in Eden, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." Normally women don't have seed; men do. Only once in history did a woman have a seed--that woman was Mary. The Spirit of God created a seed in her.

3. John 6:38--Jesus said, "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me." Jesus' life did not begin when He arrived on earth--He had already existed.

4. John 1:1-3--"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." Again, Jesus Christ existed before He was born. And He is our Creator.

5. John 1:14-15--"The Word was made flesh.... John bore witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spoke, he that cometh after me is preferred before me; for he was before me." John the Baptist was born before Jesus was (Luke 1:57). But John said, "He was before me."

6. John 8:56-58--Jesus said, "Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?"

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

7. John 17:4-5--Jesus said, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

The birth of Jesus was truly miraculous. God didn't need a man to impregnate Mary. He created an embryo.

B. Defended

Those who deny the virgin birth argue that it is biologically impossible. They're right! It was also biologically impossible to create Adam from dirt, but God did it. It was also biologically impossible to create Eve from the side of Adam, but God did that, too. Biological impossibilities mean nothing to God because He transcends the natural world.

Some claim the Jewish Christians invented the virgin birth. But why would they invent a virgin birth when they weren't expecting one, having misunderstood Isaiah 7:14? From its inception the church believed in the virgin birth. Aristides, a post-apostolic writer, said of Jesus, "He is Himself Son of God on high, who was manifested of the Holy Spirit, came down from heaven, and being born of a Hebrew virgin took on His flesh from the virgin.... He it is who was according to the flesh born of the race of the Hebrews, by the God-fearing virgin Miriam" (Rendel Harris, ed., *The Apology of Aristides* [London: Cambridge University, 1893], p. 32). Early Christians believed in the virgin birth.

Usually people argue against the virgin birth because of hatred or prejudice against Christ. For example, a genealogical table dating from A.D. 70 lists Jesus as the illegitimate son of a married woman. The writings of the early rabbis said He was the illegitimate son of an adultress and Panthera, a Roman legionnaire (Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960], p. 17). However, Jewish skeptic Hugh Schonfield points out, "There would be no object in making [such a claim] unless the Christian original (genealogy) made some claim that the birth of Jesus was not normal" (According to the Hebrews [London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1937], p. 140). So from the beginning the church believed Jesus was born of a virgin. One of the greatest proofs of His divine, virgin birth is His sinless life.

II. HIS MIRACULOUS LIFE

A. Hebrews 4:15

"We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Jesus Christ never sinned.

B. Hebrews 7:26

"Such an high priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." The Bible teaches that God cannot sin (Matt. 5:48; 1 John 1:5); therefore, Christ could not sin. Someone may object to such a claim by saying it makes Christ's

temptation a farce. Actually it means Christ endured the greatest possible temptation because He never yielded.

C. Matthew 27:4

Judas Iscariot said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood." Even the twisted mind of Judas acknowledged the sinless life of Jesus. Although an unbeliever, he was still able to make that judgment.

D. Luke 23:4

"Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man." An unbelieving Roman governor recognized Christ's innocence.

E. Luke 23:41

"And we, indeed, [suffer] justly But this man hath done nothing amiss." One of the thieves crucified with Christ came to the same conclusion.

Christ's sinless life was the natural result of His supernatural birth.

III. HIS MIRACULOUS WORDS

One of the most startling things about Christ was His words. It is impossible to read the gospels without noticing the miraculous nature of His teaching. The Pharisees dispatched Temple police to arrest Jesus, but they returned and said, "Never man spoke like this man" (John 7:46). He taught about God, angels, men, earth, heaven, hell, the past, present, and future. He raised questions no man could answer and answered questions that were seemingly unanswerable. Nicodemus, a high-ranking teacher and ruler in Israel, said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). Jesus' words were clearly supernatural.

IV. HIS MIRACULOUS WORKS

Nicodemus was not a follower of Christ when he approached Him in John 3. Nevertheless he knew Jesus was from God, saying, "No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (v. 2). It was obvious even to Christ's enemies that God was with Him because of the supernatural works He did.

People who claim to perform miracles today usually restrict their claims to healing. Jesus and the apostles, however, were not selective. Also the miracles Jesus did were never partial, temporary, or trivial.

Christ's miracles can be cataloged under three headings.

A. Miracles over Nature

1. Turning water into wine (John 2:1-11)
2. Multiplying food (John 6:1-14)
3. Quieting a storm (Matt. 8:23-27)
4. Gathering fish (Luke 5:1-11)
5. Walking on water (Matt. 14:22-33)
6. Getting tax money from a fish (Matt. 17:24-27)
7. Drying up a fig tree (Matt. 21:18-22)

Jesus ordered nature and it obeyed, because He made it.

B. Miracles over Disease

1. A leper (Luke 5:12-15)
2. A paralytic (Mark 2:3-12)
3. Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29-31)
4. A nobleman's son (John 4:46-53)
5. A debilitating disease (John 5:1-9)
6. A withered hand (Mark 3:1-5)
7. The deaf and dumb (Mark 7:31-37)
8. The blind (John 9:1-7)
9. The ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19)
10. Malchus's ear (Luke 22:47-51; John 18:10)

C. Miracles over Death

1. Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35-43)
2. The widow's son (Luke 7:11-15)

3. Lazarus (John 11:1-44)

When Jesus commanded that the stone be removed from the mouth of Lazarus' tomb, Martha, Lazarus' sister, said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh" (v. 39). Then Jesus thanked the Father for what was about to happen and said, "Lazarus, come forth" (v. 43). What a test of His power! And Lazarus came out (v. 44). Apparently the people were so shocked that Jesus had to tell them to remove Lazarus's grave clothes (v. 44).

Julian the Apostate was the Roman Emperor from A.D. 361 to 363. Although intensely anti-Christian, in his work against Christianity he said, "Jesus...has now been celebrated about three hundred years; having done nothing in His lifetime worthy of fame, unless anyone thinks it a very great work to heal lame and blind people and exorcise demoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany" (cited by Philip Schaff, *The Person of Christ*, p. 133). Unwittingly he bore witness to the miraculous power of Jesus Christ.

V. HIS MIRACULOUS INFLUENCE

There has never been a person like Jesus Christ. The eternal destiny of every human being depends on Him. Acts 4:12 says, "Neither is there salvation in any other." Philippians 2:10 says "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow."

A. Ernest Renan

"Whatever may be the unexpected phenomena of the future, Jesus will not be surpassed" (*The Life of Jesus* [New York: Brentano's, 1863], p. 311).

B. Napoleon

"I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ was not a man. Superficial men see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of Empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist" (Hiram E. Casey, ed. *Law, Love and Religion of Napoleon Bonaparte in His Own Words* [New York: Carlton, 1961], p. 64).

C. Bernard Ramm

"A historic person named Jesus gave certain men such an impact as to be unequaled by far in the entire annals of the human race. After nearly two thousand years the impact is not at all spent, but daily there are people who have tremendous revolutionary experiences which they associate with Jesus Christ, be He dead or risen in Heaven. The personality of Jesus is without parallel. It is unique and incomparable" (*Protestant Christian Evidences* [Chicago: Moody, 1953], p. 171).

It's astounding that people today can be transformed by committing their lives to this historical person who lived two thousand years ago. He's the living Christ. He was Master over hungry crowds and angry Pharisees, clever theologians and bitter sinners, ignorant disciples and intelligent

governors. He was Master over Himself: He struggled in the Garden of Gethsemane over blood, sweat, and tears and emerged victorious, completely dedicated to God. Through the terrible agony of the cross all around Him were in fury, yet He was calm and in control. As He died, He forgave a penitent thief and ushered him into Paradise. He remembered His mother and His beloved friend John. Because of the loss of blood, and the shock and torture of crucifixion, He calmly fulfilled the last prophecy concerning Him by saying, "I thirst" (John 19:28; cf., Ps. 69:21; 22:15)). In obedience to the Father's will He voluntarily yielded Himself to death (cf., John 10:11, 15, 17-18). No one has ever been born like Him; no one has ever lived like Him; no one has ever died like Him.

VI. HIS MIRACULOUS RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest witness to His power. As we saw, He actually controlled His own death. He also controlled His own burial by making certain He was buried in the right place (Isa. 53:9). At the proper time He left the tomb (Isa. 53:10), and it's been empty ever since. Jesus conquered death! But that shouldn't surprise us. God is supernatural; death is not an obstacle for Him. The marvelous thing about His resurrection is that He conquered death not only for Himself, but also for us. In John 14:19 Christ told His disciples, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

In *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* Josh McDowell, borrowing the approach Bernard Ramm takes in *Protestant Christian Evidences*, asks, "If God became a man, what would we expect Him to be like?" His conclusions are (1) "If God became a man, we would expect Him to have an unusual entrance into this life"--Jesus did. (2) "If God became man, we would expect Him to be without sin"--Jesus was. (3) "If God became man, we would expect Him to manifest the supernatural in the form of miracles"--Jesus did. (4) "If God became man, we would expect Him to have an acute sense of difference from other men"--Jesus did. (5) "If God became man, certainly His words would be the greatest ever spoken"--Jesus words were. (6) "If God became man, we would expect Him to have a lasting and universal influence"--Jesus has. (7) "If God became man, we would expect Him to satisfy the spiritual hunger in man"--Jesus did. (8) "If God became man, we would expect Him to exercise power over death"--Jesus certainly did that ([San Bernadino, Calif.: Here's Life, 1979], pp. 111-40). God did become man--Jesus Christ is God.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why should we expect miracles in true revelation from God?
2. When in the Old Testament were miracles normative? In the New Testament?
3. What was the purpose of miracles?
4. What do 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:4 teach about miracles?
5. Today we know whether a man speaks for God by comparing him and his message to the _____

of _____ .

6. Explain Ronald Baxter's argument against miracles' being normative for today.
7. Do miracles happen today? Explain?
8. What is the meaning of John 14:12?
9. Did Jesus ever claim to be equal with God? Support your answer with Scripture.
10. What did Jesus cite to prove His deity? Support your answer with Scripture.
11. What does "Immanuel" mean (Matt. 1:23)?
12. One of the greatest proofs of the virgin birth is Christ's _____ life.
13. What are some Bible verses that demonstrate Christ's sinlessness?
14. Christ's miracles can be cataloged under what three headings?
15. For whom did Jesus' resurrection conquer death?

Pondering the Principles

1. Jesus Christ is Christianity; apart from Him we have no faith, no salvation, and no hope. No one who is truly Christian would deny that. But from the inception of Christianity Satan has attempted to destroy Christ's church, question His deity, and discount His sacrifice. Religions, cults, and false teachers rally to Satan's aid. As Christians, we should expect such attacks on the Person of Christ from those outside our ranks and be prepared to answer them with a biblical defense. But a more subtle and dangerous attack has arisen, which manifests itself not in blasphemous insults but in casual neglect. A Christianity that isn't saturated with Jesus Christ from beginning to end is unorthodox. In fact, it's only as the Spirit reveals Christ to us in the Word that we grow spiritually. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3:18, Colossians 1:18, 28, and 2 Peter 1:3. Take time now to praise the Lord Jesus Christ for His character and works and ask Him for a renewed love and commitment to being His disciple.

2. Although we especially celebrate our Lord's resurrection at Easter, because of its vital importance to our faith, we should consider its truths constantly. Read 1 Corinthians 15, noting the ramifications of Christ's resurrection. Take time now to thank God for raising Christ and giving us the promise that one day we too shall be raised.

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