

## MIRACLES (1)

### Do you believe in miracles?

#### A. Introduction

##### 1. Do you believe in miracles?

Some people will say "Yes". Some people will say "No". Some people will say "Yes" and "No". Some people may even say "Yes" and "Yes".

The answer given will depend on what is meant by the word 'miracle'.

##### 2. What is a miracle?

The word 'miracle' is often used to describe an unlikely event, like surviving a life-threatening situation such as natural disaster or recovering from a terminal illness.

But there's another way the word 'miracle' is used.

To describe the unusual or less common events (not only in being rare but also in how they happen) brought about by God, which are recorded for us in the Bible.

The Bible uses three terms to describe these events: Signs, Wonders, and Mighty Works.

"But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you." (Exodus 7:3-4)

"Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders – great and terrible – upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household." (Deuteronomy 6:22)

"He struck down the firstborn of Egypt, the firstborn of men and animals. He sent his signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants. He struck down many nations and killed mighty kings – Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan and all the kings of Canaan – and he gave their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to his people Israel." (Psalm 135:8-12)

"Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4:30)

"The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people." (Acts 5:12)

"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done – by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit." (Romans 15:18-19)

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles [mighty works], wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know." (Acts 2:22)

"The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders and miracles [mighty works] – were done among you with great perseverance." (2 Corinthians 12:12)

"God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." (Hebrews 2:4)

What is meant by each of these terms?

Signs are something which points to or that indicates something else.

Wonders are events that are extraordinary and cause people to be amazed or astonished.

Mighty works are acts of great power – God's power.

So any definition of a miracle needs to include how it is a mighty act of God, that is unusual, and which has a specific purpose.

3. God's miracles are therefore different to God's providence, which is His preserving and His directing of what He has created.

"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease." (Genesis 8:22)

*"God in his ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure."* (Westminster Confession of Faith 5:3)

4. Back to the original question, 'Do you believe in miracles?'

Some people will say "Yes" – meaning that they believe that unusual events like recovering from a serious illness do take place.

Some people will say "No" – meaning that these unusual events are not miracles because they can be explained by natural laws.

Some people will say "Yes" and "No" – meaning that they believe these unusual events happen from time to time but don't believe that the extraordinary events recorded in the Bible took place.

Some people will say "Yes" and "Yes" – meaning that they believe these unusual events do take place from time to time because God is providentially at work in this world, but also that the extraordinary acts of God recorded in the Bible did happen, and there is specific reason why they did.

5. In this series we are going to be studying the miracles we find in the Bible, particularly focusing on the miracles that Jesus did and the reason why He did them.

But before we look at what miracles Jesus did and why He did them, we need to take a step back and answer two other questions.

i) Can we believe in miracles? – Is a belief in miracles rational or reasonable?

ii) Must we believe in miracles? – Is a belief in miracles essential?

## **B. Can we believe in miracles?**

1. The Bible tells us that a number of miraculous events took place at particular moments in history.

Some of these are done by God directly such as the creation of the universe out of nothing, the flood, confusion of languages at Babel, Lot's wife turning into a pillar of salt, the birth of Isaac, Balaam's donkey, Jonah being swallowed by a big fish, or Daniel's protection from hungry lions.

Some of these are done by God through particular people, such as the miracles done by Moses, Elijah and Elisha, and the apostles.

Then of course there are all the miracles that Jesus did.

2. Did these miracles really happen?

Lots of people don't believe they did.

Why?

Because they've never seen anything like them happen with their own eyes. But isn't that the point of a miracle. It's meant to be unusual, and because it is, there must be a specific reason why God has acted in this extraordinary way.

Because they say science has disproved them. But has it? Has science come up with a credible explanation for how all these different miracles happen or been able to replicate them?

Because the eyewitnesses to them had limited understanding of how the world works.

CS Lewis: *"If a man had no conception of a regular order in nature, then of course he could not notice departures from that order. When the disciples saw Christ walking on the water, they were frightened: they would not have been frightened unless they had known the laws of nature, and known that this was an exception."*

### 3. Are there good reasons for believing in miracles?

#### i) Belief in miracles is reasonable if God exists.

They are exactly the kind of things you would expect God to be able to do.

If God does not exist, clearly miracles do not exist either, because by definition they are mighty acts of God.

#### ii) Belief in miracles is also reasonable if the Bible is true.

If the Bible is true, then the miracles it tells us about must be true as well.

The miracles that Jesus and the apostles did that are reported by Luke were based on the testimony of lots of different eye-witnesses. For a miracle like the feeding of the 5000 he would have had a lot of eyewitnesses to back up and confirm what he wrote down.

"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eye-witnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4)

Interestingly we also have the testimony of Jesus' enemies, who acknowledge that He had done many miracles.

"Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing?" they asked, "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (John 11:47-48)

However, if some has already decided that God does not exist or that miracles are impossible, it is unlikely that these testimonies of eye-witnesses will change their mind.

### 4. For the person who believes that God exists and the Bible is true, it perfectly reasonable to believe in miracles.

## **C. Must we believe in miracles?**

### 1. Even though there are good reasons to believe that the miraculous events recorded in the Bible did take place, does it really matter whether they did or not?

Is a belief in miracles essential?

Peter Kreeft: *"No other religion but Christianity absolutely demands belief in miracles. Disbelieve in miracles and you have not lost anything essential to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, or modern Judaism (as distinct from Biblical Judaism); but disbelieve in miracles and you are, quite simply, not a Christian."*

### 2. Why must we believe in miracles?

If the miracles of the Bible did not happen, how can we trust what the Bible says about everything else.

This is one of the reasons why opponents of Christianity attack the credibility of the miracles because they know that if they could prove that miracles don't happen then the whole message of the Bible would be undermined.

If the miracles of the Bible did not happen, what we believe about who Jesus is and what He has done for us is a lie.

CS Lewis: *"The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became Man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this."*

If the miracles of the Bible did not happen there is no salvation and no hope for us, because if the natural realm is fallen, salvation needs to come from outside of it.

Richard Phillips: *"Christianity differs from these in that it posits a world that in its natural state is lost, that requires an inbreaking of divine power and action for salvation. The Bible teaches that because of sin nature is fallen into a situation that is hopeless unless something supernatural happens. The Christian message is called good news precisely because it proclaims this intervention. God has broken into our world, and because he has, because there is saving power from outside of the natural realm, there is hope for those who look to him in faith."*