

EXPLAINING MIRACLES

*“For with God nothing will be impossible”
Luke 1:37*

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EXPLAINING MIRACLES

Why do many Christians have so much trouble accepting the miracles of God? They don't mind so much the miracles that are recorded in the Bible; but even then, many are only comfortable with the regular, run of the mill, miracles—such as healing people.

When it comes to holding back the waters of the Red Sea so that the people of Israel could cross to the other side, many Christians are rather keen to believe that the crossing coincided with a natural phenomenon that occurred in those parts.

I remember reading some years ago that such was the explanation for the Jordan River drying up so that the Israelites could cross into the Promised Land.

These people forget or don't know, that the waters were in full flood and parted as the priests with the Ark made their first step into the waters; or that they passed across on dry ground and the waters commenced flowing again as soon as the last Israelites had passed over; or that Elijah and Elisha had the exact same experience when they wanted to pass across; or that Elisha experienced it again shortly afterwards following the death of Elijah on the other side of the Jordan River.

I recall also an Anglican minister saying that the Israelites passed across the Red Sea right up north where it was really only a river or even a sort of small creek. He seemed to forget that they crossed over on dry ground; and that the waters were banked up; or that the returning waters drowned the Egyptian army pursuing them.

Incidentally, I don't believe many Christians realise that a million or so Israelites passed through the Red Sea on this occasion.

So there are both Christians and non-Christians who are continually trying to explain away God's miracles as natural occurrences.

Only within the past few months someone told me he read that the plagues of Egypt were quite commonly occurring phenomena in those days.

Every year we seem to have a new theory about the Star of Bethlehem; how it could have been a comet or some other equally ridiculous explanation. The fact that it was seen for two years, led the three Wise Men to Bethlehem, and then stopped over a house, seems to have escaped the attention of these people. Their objective seems to be to discount the possibility of a miracle, and they do this by trying to find a natural explanation for it.

This, of course, is so that we will not believe that God can do these wonderful things, and want to worship him. The purpose is to bring God down to a manageable size so that we can deal with him on a rational level; and furthermore, so that we do not become too carried away with the truth of the scriptures, but can take parts of it with a grain of salt.

One unfortunate result of some of these so called ‘explanations’ of the miracles is that Christians can come to think that it’s a good thing to have rational, “scientific” explanations.

They can be comforted into thinking that the modern-day scientists and others, are confirming what the Bible says by backing it up with these explanations.

In this way they can be subtly led into discounting them as miracles of God, and treating them as everyday occurrences.

So how do we, as Christians, deal with the idea of really extraordinary miracles like Jonah in the fish’s stomach, the animals going into the ark, the sun standing still for a day, and so on?

THE C.S. LEWIS APPROACH

In his book “Miracles”, C.S. Lewis divides the miracles of the New Testament into two categories—

1. Miracles of the old creation
2. Miracles of the new creation

The first category covers such as healings, control of the elements, the virgin birth of Jesus, the feeding of the thousands, water into wine. Each of these, says Lewis, are examples of what God normally does every day, only here they are speeded-up versions.

- a. healings – God is responsible for all healings; doctors and medicines are merely his tools. So healing on the instant is just a speeded-up version.
- b. control of the elements again is a normal function of God in the world
- c. the virgin birth is God creating a new life within a female person, something he does every day with every birth of humans and other living creatures.
- d. feeding thousands, another case of doing quickly what God normally does more slowly—creates food
- e. turning water into wine is exactly what a grapevine does regularly, only not so quickly.

Examples of the second category, miracles of the new creation, are such as—Christ’s resurrection, raising Lazarus to life, the transfiguration, Christ walking on water. Let’s look at each of these.

- a. The resurrection is a unique example of life after death because Jesus goes on to a new form of life in heaven. It is the type of life which all believers in him will experience at their resurrection.
- b. The transfiguration on the mountain, when his person glowed shining white with heavenly light, and when Moses

and Elijah joined Jesus, is a similar event—showing a glorious change in keeping with the heavenly life to come

C.S. Lewis says the raising of Lazarus and walking on water also come into this category, but I don't follow his reasoning very well in this regard.

In the Old Testament people were raised from the dead through the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Through Elisha God also caused an axe to float in the Jordan River.

Certainly C.S. Lewis discusses some very interesting aspects of New Testament miracles but his discussion leaves much to be thought about.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MIRACLES

One lady said to me that she found it difficult to believe in the Bible because of the miracles, and miracles seem to be a sticking point for many people, both Christians and non-Christians, as they struggle to come to grips with the credibility of the Biblical accounts, and with matters of faith generally.

We are all used to applying a questioning approach in life, and have been trained from early childhood that it is right to do so—even to go to the extent of being sceptical. These concepts apply very well to worldly matters and help us to avoid many pitfalls, and the wiles of charlatans.

But when it comes to the words and the actions of God as expressed in the Bible, we have a totally different scenario. God specifically states in the Bible that we will know he is speaking and acting because of “signs and wonders” which make it clear that this is so.

Jesus even went to the extent of saying “Don't believe me unless the miracles that I do prove that I am who I say I am”. God demonstrates that the Bible is really his word to us by means of signs and wonders which are specifically of two broad types—

- a. prophecies about the future which come true
- b. many different miracles.

God makes it clear that humans cannot do these things without divine help, and this establishes the credibility of his Word, the Bible.

So miracles should not be a cause for disbelieving the Bible, but for believing the Bible to be the Word of God.

HOW CAN GOD DO MIRACLES?

When faced with the seemingly impossible acts of God presented in the Bible, we tend to ask, either openly or mentally—“How could God do that?”

I want to approach this question in a scientific way.

Suppose we have a completely sealed glass box with only air inside. A question – is it scientifically possible for us to wake up one morning and find a live mouse in this sealed box?

The answer is clearly .. **NO!** it is not; in fact, scientifically it is impossible.

Let us now go to the Bible and read about one of the best attested events – John 20:19---

“That evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors, in fear of the Jewish leaders, when suddenly Jesus was standing there among them”

Here we have a completely sealed room and a living person appears in it; one who was not there previously.

Now we have just established that such an event is scientifically impossible. Therefore, if the event is true—wait for it—**GOD DOES THE IMPOSSIBLE.**

But was the event true? One person thought it might not be—namely, the disciple Thomas, known ever since as ‘doubting Thomas’. He said, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands—and put my fingers into them, and place my hand into his side”.

Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked, but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them and greeting them. ‘Then he said to Thomas, “Put your fingers into my hands, put your hand into my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!” “My Lord and my God!” Thomas said.’ (John 20:26-28)

So Thomas was sceptical, we might say on behalf of all mankind, and was permitted to discover a great truth ---

GOD DOES THE IMPOSSIBLE

But God had already told Thomas and us, in his Word, that he could do this. Jesus said, “What is impossible with men is possible with God”. Luke 18:27

FURTHER EXAMPLES OF GOD DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

At Christ’s transfiguration, both Moses and Elijah were present talking to the Lord—not their ghosts, but the two prophets themselves. This is scientifically impossible—they had been dead for over 1000 years.

Similarly, of course, at the bodily resurrection of the dead, we who are saved by Christ, will rise to life with new heavenly bodies, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:51 (Living Bible):--

“But I am telling you this strange and wonderful secret: we shall not all die, but we shall all be given new bodies. It will all happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For there will be a trumpet blast from the sky and all the Christians who have died will suddenly become alive, with new bodies that will never, never die; and then we who are alive still shall suddenly have new bodies too.”

As Christians, our great hope lies in the truth of these wonderful words. Therefore, we above all people should resoundingly declare—“Our God can do, and does, the impossible!” And we ought to rejoice in this, for it is our great hope. In other words, we ought to rejoice and be glad about the fact that our God performs miracles. We should expect him to do so, and would be disappointed if he did not.

Once we accept this great truth and absorb it right into our belief system and our very souls, we need have no difficulty whatsoever accepting any miracle of God as presented in the Bible, or since Biblical times, and, indeed, in our own time.

THE BIGGEST MIRACLE?

Some may say that the virgin birth was the greatest miracle; some may say the resurrection of Jesus; but the biggest in terms of sheer size could well be the creation of the universe out of nothing.

Even non-believing scientists, either openly or by inference, have to admit that this is a miracle—and why do I say this?

Because clearly there was nothing there before the universe came into being, or we would be discussing the creation of the something that was there. And as the universe came into being out of nothing, then it is scientifically impossible, because science says you can't produce something out of nothing.

Incidentally these non-believing scientists try to fool us into thinking it was not a miracle of God by inventing a “big bang” theory, and such like. They don’t explain how a big bang could produce something out of nothing, which they themselves declare to be impossible.

But we do know that God does produce something out of nothing, as we discussed earlier.

We now know what an immense creation the universe really is. It was brought home to me graphically when I read that a space probe launched from earth had taken 11 years to traverse our solar system; to arrive at the nearest star equivalent to our sun, it would have to travel at the same speed for a further 25000 years. And, there are over one billion such stars in our galaxy, and over one billion galaxies. This is a big, big miracle.

But if God can produce a person out of nothing, why can’t he produce anything out of nothing? Or why not everything out of nothing? I was once asked why God made the universe so vast. My reply was that God tells us in the Bible that “the heavens declare the glory of God”.

It seems reasonable that an omnipotent God would create a seemingly unlimited universe—especially as he wants his created people to know how almighty he is, and to give him glory, and honour, and worship—to be his people and for him to be their God, and their only God. So he provides ample evidence through his creation and other signs and wonders that this is so.

CONCLUSION

Yes, God does the impossible—that is, miracles. Why not just accept this as a wonderful fact and, in effect, as God’s signature; and furthermore, why not rejoice in it, and overcome any tendency we may have to be disturbed by the idea of miracles.

And, finally, let us not be too ready to wish to find natural, or reasonable, or scientific reasons behind the miracles of God—they are just examples of God doing what he has always done—the impossible.

(For a further discussion of this subject as related to present-day miracles, reference can be made to the booklet “God is with Us”)