

Chapter 11. Miracles

Luke 18 ²⁷But he said, “What is impossible with man is possible with God.”

Session overview

- Define and explain miracles
- Illustrate the deep coherence of recorded miracles in the Gospel According to John
- Explore prophecy as supporting the Christian worldview

Miracles defined

- Miracles are often defined as violations of natural law
- Natural laws are typically scientific generalizations based on numerous empirical observations
- This definition of miracles is not found in the Bible
- Miracles in the Bible are defined simply as mighty acts
- What distinguishes miracles from natural law is purely a man-made distinction

Atheist claim (Atheist here is simply a non-theist, someone who does not have a belief in deities.)

Premise: Miracles occur only if it can be conclusively demonstrated that the event was not caused by any presently known or unknown natural law

Observation: We do not know all presently unknown natural laws

Conclusion: Miracles cannot be proven to occur

Weak theist claim

Premise: Miracles occur only if it can be conclusively demonstrated that the event was not caused by any presently known natural law

Observation: We observe an apparent violation of known natural laws

Conclusion: Miracles are proven to occur

Strong theist claim

Premise: Miracles are certainly possible

Observation: The Bible presents reliable, eyewitness accounts, clear prophecies, extra-Biblical evidence supports the existence of miracles, and I have personally experienced miracles

Conclusion: Therefore, miracles occur and my belief that they occur is perfectly rational

Genesis 1:1 (Greatest miracle of all)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

- Note if the first Bible verse is true, then every other recorded miracle would be rather trivial
- From Isaiah, we see that God actively created all things on the earth and continues that creative activity to this day

Isaiah 42:5

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it:

- The heart of the Bible is the gospel of Jesus Christ—a clear and phenomenal miracle

1 Corinthians 15:1-6

¹Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ²and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

- Note the appeal to empirical evidence when writing to the Corinthian church
- There is only one gospel; however, there are four accounts of it given in the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John)
- Ezekiel, when describing the glory of the Lord, writes about four living creatures each with four faces

Ezekiel 1:10

As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle.

- One view of the four accounts of the gospel is related to Ezekiel's vision
 - Matthew depicts Jesus as the King of the Jews (lion)
 - Mark depicts Jesus as a suffering servant (ox)
 - Luke depicts Jesus as human
 - John depicts Jesus as a heavenly King (eagle)
- Whether intentional or not, it is a useful aid in understanding the four accounts of the gospel

Miracles recorded in the Gospel According to John

- Jesus did many things that were interpreted at the time as miraculous
- John only records seven major miracles or signs. Why?

John 20:30-31

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

- Figure below provides a humorous example of a sign
- Sign's purpose is pointing to something of significance

- In the gospel according to John, these signs were recorded so that you may entrust your life to Jesus Christ and conjoin into a deeply fulfilling relationship with God

Illustration of sign's role



- It is important not to fixate on miracles only to completely miss the sign's intention
- Following table presents the seven signs aligned with the seven declarations Jesus made regarding himself

Jesus Christ is God's ...:¹	Physical Miracle	Jesus Christ's "I am ..."
Joy for your disappointments	Water to wine, 2:1-11	True vine, 15:1
Assurance for your doubts	Nobleman's son healed, 4:46-54	Way, truth, and life, 14:6
Strength for your disabilities	Invalid at the pool, 5:1-16	Good shepherd, 10:11
Satisfaction for your desire	Feeding of 5,000, 6:1-13	Bread of life, 6:35
Peace for your despair	Storm at sea, 6:15-21	The door, 10:7
Light for your darkness	Blind man sees, 9:1-7	Light of the world, 8:12
Life for your death	Dead man lives, 11:1-46	Resurrection and life, 11:25

¹Column one based on Adrian Rogers, *Believe in Miracles But Trust in Jesus*, 1997. All references in this table are to verses in the Gospel According to John, New Testament, Bible.

- If you take the time to work through these seven signs, you will see a deep coherence within the Bible that is very difficult to simply explain away

Prophecy

- Throughout history there have been various claims of prophetic utterances allegedly supporting some person or cause
- Prophecy in this context is simply a prediction
- Prophecy says that a specific thing will happen
- There are numerous prophecies that actually were fulfilled by Jesus Christ
- Jesus explains that these prophecies were related to him:

Luke 24:27

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Acts 10:42-43

⁴²And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

- Often Jesus spoke in parables that lacked concreteness, frustrating some of his followers. Jesus indicates that it is intentional.

Matthew 13:10-12

¹⁰Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

- If prophecies like parables are not clear, then perhaps prophecy fulfillment is simply random chance

Prophecy fulfillment as random chance

- Suppose prophecy has two outcomes (fulfilled, not fulfilled) with a probability, p , of fulfillment
- Most biblical scholars have identified at least 25 prophecies fulfilled regarding the betrayal, trial, death, and burial of Jesus Christ all of which were fulfilled in one 24-hour period
- There are 109 fulfilled prophecies concerning the first coming of Jesus Christ
- If we assume the probability of fulfillment is 50% ($p = 1/2$), is it possible that these fulfillments were just by chance?
 - If $p = 1/2$, then $(1/2)^{25} = 2.98 \times 10^{-8}$ or 1-in-33,554,432.

○ If $p = 1/2$, then $(1/2)^{109} = 1.54 \times 10^{-33}$ 1-in-649,037,107,316,853,453,566,312,041,152,512.

- The odds of this set of events happening by chance is the same chance of picking a particular flea at random from one of 87 billion fleas on each of 87 billion dogs owned by each of 87 billion people (population of 20 earths)
- Rationally there must be a better explanation
- One obvious explanation is that the Bible is simply a God-directed love letter that includes prophecies that empirically validate its authenticity

What day would the Messiah be executed?

- Daniel points to when Messiah would be “cut off”
- This prophecy has numerous interpretations, but ends up very near the day of Jesus’s death

Daniel 9:25-26

²⁵Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. ²⁶And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed.

- The Hebrew word for week is shabuwa` (shaw-boo'-ah) literal, sevened, i.e. a week (specifically, of years): KJV - seven, week²
- In context, we find this same word indicating years

Genesis 29:27-28

²⁷Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.”

²⁸Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

²There is a numbering system for every word in the Bible. Hence, Strong's number 7620 is helpful to find other uses of this exact same word.

- The prediction in Daniel 9:1 was given in 539-538 BC. Daniel 9:25 states the initiating event was the order to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. This order is given in Nehemiah 2 dated as March 14, 445 BC. Let's do some math:
 - 69 "weeks" = $69 \times 7 = 483$ years after initiating event
 - A prophetic year is 360 days. (See Daniel 7:25, 12:7, Revelation 11:2-3, 12:6, 14; 13:5)
 - $483 \text{ years} \times 360 \text{ days/year} = 173,880 \text{ days}$.
 - Gregorian calendar days (365 days/year + leap-years).
 - March 14, 445 BC to March 13, AD 32 = $(445 \text{ years} + 32 \text{ years} - 1 \text{ year}) \times 365 = 173,740 \text{ days}$ (ignoring leap-years).
 - March 14, AD 32 - April 6, AD 32 = 24 days.

- Leap-year rule: $\text{Year}/4 = \text{yes}$, $\text{year}/100 = \text{no}$, and $\text{year}/400 = \text{yes}$.
- 445 BC to AD 32 implies 119 possible leap years.
- Years 300 BC, 200 BC, and 100 BC are not leap-years but year 400 BC is.
- Total days between March 14, 445 to April 6, AD 32 = $173,740 + 24 + 119 - 3 = 173,880$.
- There are several concerns with this calculation that have been given over the years missing the main point: Regardless of how this prediction is interpreted, Jesus Christ is the only representative that came anywhere close to fulfilling this prediction. There is no other.

- Can we confirm the start date for the prophecy which calculates the date on which Jesus presented himself as Messiah in Daniel 9:25? In the fifth century B.C. a Hebrew named Nehemiah, then cup bearer to the Medo-Persian king Artaxerxes, wrote of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 2:1-2

¹In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. ²And the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid.

- Nehemiah went on to explain that he was sad because he had heard reports that the city of his people, Jerusalem, was still desolate. Nehemiah, requested that he be allowed to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the city. King Artaxerxes granted his wish on the spot and gave him official documents for easy passage. This occurred, we are told in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus' reign.
- This Prophecy is one of the most astonishing proofs that God transcends time and is able to see the end from the beginning with incredible precision

List of Prophecies

Prophecy Given	Prophecy Fulfilled	Comments
Daniel 9:25-26	Luke 23:54	Day of Messiah's Death
Genesis 3:15	Luke 23:33	Messiah's foot will be injured, seed of a woman
Isaiah 53	Luke 23	Numerous references to Messiah's abuse and death
Isaiah 50:6	Matthew 26:67	Messiah is beaten
Micah 5:1	Luke 22:63	Messiah is slapped in face
Psalms 22:16	Luke 23:33	Messiah's hands pierced
Zechariah 12:10	Luke 23:48-49	People mourn Messiah's death
Psalms 34:20	John 19:33	No bones are broken

Psalm 22:14	John 19:33-34	Poured out like water, bones out of joint
Genesis 12:1-3	Matthew 1:1, Galatians 3:8,16	Messiah lineage of Abraham
Genesis 17:19, 21:2	Luke 3:23, 34, Romans 4:18ff	Messiah lineage of Isaac
Numbers 24:17	Matthew 1:2	Messiah lineage of Jacob
Genesis 49:10	Luke 3:33, Matthew 25:31-2	Messiah lineage of Judah
Ezekiel 21:27	Various	Israel will have no king until Jesus

Genesis 49:10	Luke 2:14, Romans 5:1	Shiloh = peace, Messiah shall bring peace
Isaiah 11:1, 10	Luke 3:23,32	Messiah lineage of Jesse
Jeremiah 23:5, 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Psalm 132:11	Luke 3:23, 31, Matthew 1:1, 9:27, Revelation 22:16	Messiah lineage of David
Micah 5:2	Luke 2:4	Messiah born in Bethlehem
Psalms 69:21	Matthew 27:34,48, John 19:28ff	Gall and vinegar
Isaiah 9:7	Luke 1:32,33	Heir to throne of David

Isaiah 7:14	Luke 1:26,27, 30, 31	Born of a virgin
Jeremiah 31:15	Matthew 2:16-18	Slaughter of children
Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:14-15	Flight to Egypt
Isaiah 40:3-5	Luke 3:3-6	The way shall be prepared
Malachi 3:1	Luke 7:24, 27	Preceded by a forerunner
Malachi 4:5-6	Matthew 11:13-14	Preceded by Elijah
Psalms 2:7	Matthew 3:17	Declared the Son of God

Isaiah 9:1	Matthew 4:13-16	Galilean ministry
Psalms 78:2-4	Matthew 13:34, 35	Speak in parables
Deuteronomy 18:15	Acts 31:20,22	A prophet
Isaiah 61:1	Luke 4:18- 19	Bind up the brokenhearted
Isaiah 53:3	John 1:11, Luke 23:18	Rejected by the Jews
Psalms 110:4	Hebrews 5:5, 6	Priest after the order of Melchizedek
Zachariah 9:9	Mark 11:7- 11	Triumphal entry

Psalm 8:2	Matthew 21:15, 16	Adored by infants
Isaiah 53:1	John 12:37,38	Not believed
Psalm 41:9	Luke 22:47,48	Betrayed by a close friend
Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:14,15	Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver
Psalm 35:11	Mark 14:57,58	Accused by false witnesses
Psalm 35:19	John 15:24,25	Hated without reason
Isaiah 53:12	Mark 15:27,28	Crucified with malefactors
Psalm 22:7,8	Luke 23:35	Sneered and mocked

Psalm 69:9	Romans 15:3	Was reproached
Psalm 109:4	Luke 23:34	Prayer for His enemies
Psalm 22:17	Matthew 27:35,36	Soldiers gambled for His clothing
Psalm 22:1	Matthew 27:46	Forsaken by God
Isaiah 53:9	Matthew 27:57-60	Buried with the rich
Psalm 16:10, 49:15	Mark 16:6-7	To be resurrected
Psalm 68:18	Mark 16:19, 1 Corinthians 15:4	His ascension to God's right hand

Miracles and personal finance

- Miracles in the Bible are defined simply as mighty acts
- God does work mightily in the affairs of His ambassadors
- As we seek first His kingdom and engage in God's disciple-making business, it is not shocking to observe direct, tangible, God-given provisions
- The challenge is simple: Go find a disciple-making follower of Jesus and simply ask them if they believe God has ever provided for them in a miraculous way
- In my experience, they will immediately point to several unique God-given provisions

Summary

- In this Chapter, we carefully defined miracles as a mighty act of God
- Clearly, if God created the universe, then everything else is rather elementary
- We explored the motivation of the documented miracles in the Gospel According to John to demonstrate how miracles primarily serve as a sign
- We then took a deep dive into one of Daniel's prophecies as well as list several others
- Conclude by giving a survey challenge

Questions?

Case Study #1:

“Miracles are defined as violations of natural law. The Bible presents many stories of miracles; hence, it is anti-scientific.” Appraise.

Case Study #2:

Steven is an angry atheist and rather annoyed at all this excitement about a carpenter that lived over 2,000 years ago. He lays out the conclusive argument against the New Testament stating:

Premise: Miracles occur only if it can be conclusively demonstrated that the event was not caused by any presently known or unknown natural law

Observation: We do not know all presently unknown natural laws

Conclusion: Miracles cannot be proven to occur

How would you respond?

Case Study #3:

“The miracles in the Gospel According to John are simply myth and illustrate an effort to make Jesus into some sort of demigod. These miracles serve no purpose other than to exalt Jesus in the eyes of his own followers.” Appraise.

Your feedback will help improve this material.

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