

## CHAPTER 5

# THE BIBLE AND MIRACLES

### **The Basis for Discussion**

A brief summary of our starting-point for this discussion is pertinent. We have established: a) the integrity of our text, thus providing assurance that we have, without reasonable doubt, what was originally written by the apostles and others; b) with considerable reason we have shown that the traditional authors of the various New Testament books were, in fact, the actual writers; c) that the men who wrote were historians who, in points that we can check, were competent, and thus trustworthy; and d) that they were promised by Jesus, and claimed said promises, to speak/write even as God so willed.

The conclusion is this: our New Testament (and Old Testament) purports to be a collection of books, authored by God through the instrumentality of men. From this basis, then, we approach the subject of miracles.

### **I. The Need for the Discussion.**

There are many reasons which could be given for discussion of the subject at hand. The three subjects that follow will encompass the major areas which produce the various questions.

### A. BIBLE ACCOUNTS.

Anyone reading either part of the Bible, whether the Old or New Testaments, will soon read accounts of events which are treated as if said events were miraculous. Consider the following as representative of what we mean:

- a) Gen. 6-8 — The Flood
- b) Gen. 18 — Destruction of four cities
- c) Gen. 40 — Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams
- d) Ex. 3 — Moses and burning bush
- e) Ex. 14 — Red Sea crossed on dry land
- f) Num. 16 — Death of Korah, Dathan, Abiram
- g) Josh. 3 — Flooded Jordan river crossed on dry land
- h) Jud. 15 — Samson kills 1,000 Philistines
- i) I Sam. 3 — God speaks to Samuel
- j) II Sam. 5 — David defeats the Philistines
- k) I Kings 18 — Elijah at Mt. Carmel
- l) II Kings 5 — Elisha heals Naaman
- m) Daniel 3 — Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego saved
- n) Jonah 1 — Jonah swallowed by a prepared fish
- o) Matt. 2 — The star for the wise men
- p) Matt. 9 — Paralytic healed
- q) Matt. 17 — Transfiguration of Jesus
- r) Mark 6 — 5,000 fed
- s) Luke 17 — Ten lepers healed
- t) Luke 18 — Blind man, Bartimaeus, healed
- u) John 11 — Lazarus raised from dead
- v) John 20 — Bodily resurrection of Jesus
- w) Acts 3 — Lame man healed
- x) Acts 9 — Conversion of Saul of Tarsus
- y) Acts 10 — Peter's vision on housetop
- z) Acts 16 — Paul heals spirit-possessed girl

These incidents, and many others of similar nature, are in the warp and woof of Bible history. To remove said events from the Bible would, in effect, actually reduce it to meaninglessness. Beginning with the creation account in Genesis 1, and through Revelation 22, it states as factual what is also considered miraculous in nature, be it such things as mentioned above, or events like the inspiration of

prophets, etc. Therefore, one reason why we must consider miracles is the Bible record itself.

### B. BIBLE CLAIMS.

When we consider the Bible record, not only do we meet accounts such as are listed above, we also are presented with the claims made in respect to the miraculous events. For instance, we are treated to the fact of a universe that has been made, and that with purpose, not by accident. An eternal, transcendent being, called God, all-wise, all-powerful, not a part of the created things, is pictured, and that quite naturally. The Bible records do not present the various miracles as if they were anything but what should be expected if such a being as God existed. Hence, though miracles are not normal, they do occur. Moreover, they happen as God intervenes in the framework of time and space, not contrary to (the "laws" of) nature, but in perfect harmony with the total system God has made, which includes (what we call) nature. (Note here William H. Davis' excellent book, *Science and Christian Faith*, esp. Ch. 4.)

Additionally, the various miracles found within the Bible are so integral a part of it, that they must be viewed within its total context, rather than as isolated phenomena. Miracles are, then, a part of God's revelation to man, quite as much as other ways he reveals himself and his will to us, thus, one of the ways redemption came to pass. They sometimes bore witness to the messenger, so that men draw the conclusion that the magicians in Pharaoh's court did (Ex. 8:19) or that Nicodemus had concluded (John 3:1ff.), since God did bear them witness by such events (Heb. 2:4). Even the direction and help given the various writers falls into the category of the miraculous, since God directly intervened in their activities, both in their speaking and writing. The result, as claimed, is that God spoke, God acted, and it is to him that we must all answer. Such is the substance of the Bible claims.

### C. MODERN THOUGHT.

Any consideration of miracles will immediately reveal one's presuppositions. One's definition of the word reveals that fact too. (C. S. Lewis ably shows that these statements are so in his book on miracles, especially in chapters 10, 13, and 17. Paul Little, among

others, also treats the problem of presuppositions in Ch. 8 and Ch. 9.) Modern thought about miracles and the supernatural actually is little changed, in principle, from the thought of previous ages. Some men eliminate the miraculous as presented in the Bible because they posit nature as a closed system (in which deity does not play a part) or no deity at all. Others accept a system in which deity does, in fact, play a part. It has always been so.

Encompassed in modern thought is also this idea: miracles, as presented in the Bible, do now occur. Hence, any adequate treatment of the subject of miracles must speak to this point as well.

From these perspectives, then, we summarize as follows:

- a) the Bible posits miracles.
- b) the Bible claims miracles to be both a work of a supernatural deity (or even of Satan as a supernatural force) and as directly related phenomena to Bible history.
- c) one's presuppositions will determine how any purported miracle will be interpreted.

## II. Bible Miracles.

That the Bible presents miracles as factual is plain to the reader, whether or not he so agrees that such can really be. That it also assigns them to a supernatural being known as God, who sometimes used human instrumentality to accomplish them is also evident. As previously mentioned, such events are recorded as quite natural, since the existence of God, as a distinct being, is also taken as fact. Of course, if one accepts God as presented (as first reading) in the Bible, the problem of miracles (during Bible times especially) disappears.

These miracles are presented as signs, wonders, or powers (Cf. Acts 2:22; II Cor. 12:12; II Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4; etc.). John's gospel used the word "work" to refer to the things which he also calls signs.

### A. NAMES.

Each of these words is appropriate, in that together they describe a miracle from various perspectives. A miracle creates "wonder" in the minds of those considering it. Often this reaction occurred in response to things that Jesus did (as in Matt. 8:27; Mark 2:12; Luke 8:56). It was to get "attention".

One of the reasons that wonder is produced is that the miracle

gives evidence of a supernatural power. The miracle produces the response such as is found in Luke 7:16, when the widow of Nain's son was raised; "a great prophet has risen among us" and "God has visited his people." Sometimes the claim which is made at the performance of the miracle is (also) cause for wonder, as at the healing of the man in Matt. 9:1-8. The power demonstrated in a miracle may be seen, as in the case of the stilling of the wind and sea (Mark 6:45-52), or in the authority claimed (Matt. 9). In both instances, power displayed and wonder expressed were coincident with the miracle itself. The miracles done by the apostles were of such nature that people stood in fear of them, Acts 5:13; and caused such as Simon to give up his practices, Acts 8, and induced multitudes to give up bad practices, and accept Christianity, Acts 19.

The word "sign" best depicts the effect the miracle is to have upon the beholder, since it is to be a demonstration of something above and beyond just the event itself. The New Testament often conveys this idea, both from the ones doing the particular miracle, and those seeing it: or questioning what someone claimed to be. Jesus said, "The works which I am doing, in the name of my Father, these testify to me." See John 2:18; Luke 2:12; Acts 3:11-16; 14:3; Rom. 15:18-19; II Cor. 12:12; II Pet. 1:16-21. It is most important to be aware that the miracle was not to be considered apart from the message to which it bore testimony. Neither were miracles to be received without careful consideration, since Satan also had power (note II Thess. 2:9-11). Any message given, whether in the miracle itself, or that to which it bore witness, was to be identical to that which came through the apostles (Gal. 1:6-9).

#### *B. PURPOSE.*

We have pretty well stated the purpose of Bible miracles in the preceding discussion, that they were to help authenticate a messenger and his message as being from God, thus to be heard and heeded. The various signs (miracles), then, especially in the New Testament, has this purpose: authentication. They also were revelational in the sense that they disclosed the nature or character of God. For instance, miracles were not always done with compassion in view, as seen in the Flood, the death of the first-born in Egypt (Ex. 12), the death of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10), the leprosy of Miriam (Num. 12), the punishment of Uzziah by death (II Sam. 6), the

destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jewish people, the death of Ananias and Sapphira, etc. Sometimes the lack of God's intervention (as in the death of John the Immerser, the affliction of Paul, II Cor. 12, or the suffering and death of many others, Heb. 11:35-40) reveals aspects of God's nature not normally seen and/or appreciated.

We readily grant what some will ask: God can still work miracles today. No one who, as an example, believes in prayer as efficacious believes otherwise. However, considering miracles as presented in the Bible, as being done directly by God, or through the instrumentality of a person, and for the basic purpose of creating faith in his messenger, we do not hold that miracles happen today. For that matter, as Warfield well states in his book on miracles, there is convincing evidence that such events ceased when the New Testament messengers, through whom the message came, ceased to live on this earth.

It is pertinent to state this: no one is attempting to limit God as to whether or when he can work in ways we may consider "miraculous". What we assert is this: that primary purpose of Bible miracles was to produce enough evidence for the onlooker to give adequate reason for him to accept the message offered as being from God. There no longer remains any such need today. Indeed, we have adequate evidence that is more than sufficient to lead us to trust the Bible to be God's revelation to man, and so to come to faith. The only obstacles in the way of acceptance are: 1) honest consideration of the Bible message, and, when that is done, 2) the will to act on the evidence at hand. God did not sell himself, his son Jesus, or the message about Jesus short. He did it right twenty centuries ago. We have but to peruse carefully that which he did.

In regard to modern miracles, so-called, if God is so acting, it is for reasons other than are evident in the Bible. Consideration of most, if not all, miracle workers of our day, makes us think of those whom Paul mentioned in II Corinthians 2:17 who were hucksters of the message. We believe if Jesus is preached as presented in the Bible, and accepted as so preached, God will produce (miraculously) a New Creation (II Cor. 5:17) by means of washing of water and renewal by the Holy Spirit's word, which miracle is the greatest thing God does for us. We remind the reader again: do not substitute the common view held today of a miracle that it is something not

understood, or apparently impossible but which happens. A miracle, in the Bible sense, is rather an intervention by God in time and space, whether direct or indirect through another agency.

It will be worth our time in view of the above statements, to consider why Jesus worked miracles. (The following is an adaptation of an essay on this subject by Seth Wilson.)

That Jesus performed many and varied "signs" is patent. Consider this list:

- a) Jn. 2 — water to wine
- b) Jn. 6 — fed the 5,000 (Cf. Mt. 14; Mk. 6; Lk. 9)
- c) Mt. 8; Mk. 4; Lk. 8 — stilled tempest
- d) Mt. 14; Mk. 6; Jn. 6 — walked on water
- e) Mt. 21; Mk. 11 — cursed fig tree
- f) Mt. 8; Mk. 5; Lk. 8 — cast out demons
- g) Lk. 7; Jn. 11 — raised the dead

Besides the above, his various healing miracles of physical afflictions, such as blindness, dumbness, lameness, fever, leprosy, epilepsy, dropsy, withered hands, and curved spines: all combine to show that he did many and varied things. He never failed. His miracles were never questioned, since almost all were done in the presence of people who could quite easily discern if that which he did was fake. That many were not healed by Jesus, though quite evidently needing it, helps confirm what he himself told the messengers from John: his miracles were done to produce faith (Cf. Matt. 11:2-6; Lk. 7:18-23; then John 20:30-31). Note here that Jesus only healed one man at the pool in Jerusalem (Jn. 5) though many were there needing healing. Paul did not heal some of his closest companions, such as Timothy (I Tim. 5:23) or Trophimus (II Tim. 4:20) or himself (II Cor. 12).

That what he did was an integral part of his credentials is made clear, both by him and those who wrote of him (Cf. Jn. 5:36; 14:10-11; Acts 2:22). Moreover, they revealed the actual purpose of miracles: not to feed the hungry, or heal the sick, but rather to point people to God. (We recommend here the article on miracles, par excellence, by Robert Mounce in Baker's Dictionary of Theology.) Miracles were not a part of the faith as such, but rather given to bear testimony to the faith.

### III. The Resurrection Miracle

Miracle of miracles: the resurrection! Much time, doubtless profitable, could be spent in discussion of Bible miracles, their meaning and application. However, if the resurrection of Jesus is not historical fact, everything else is quite pointless. If Jesus lives, Christianity lives; if not, we are . . . most to be pitied — because we are false witnesses, affirming that Jesus arose when, in fact, he did not. Those are Paul's sentiments in I Corinthians 15, and likewise of Christians of all ages (at least those who consider that Christianity is a historically-based religion). Therefore, we turn our attention to the resurrection, its proof and significance. We encourage the perusal of the "Facts-Faith" chart immediately preceding this chapter, which depicts the place the resurrection occupies in Christianity.

#### A. PROOF

If the accounts which we call our New Testament are believable, then the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth occurred. Though they may be different in their approaches to telling the story, as one would expect from independent witnesses, yet they unitedly testify to one fact: Jesus was crucified, died, was buried and rose from the dead on the third day, appearing to many (over a space of 40 days, and then ascended to the Father). We have two biographies by his chosen apostles, Matthew and John. Both of these gospels record his predictions about his death, burial and resurrection. They both record the events immediately leading up to his burial, and each records, in some detail, his resurrection and subsequent appearances.

These men were of such character that it is rather pointless to argue they deliberately told a lie about the matter. Men will believe and die for what they consider truth, whether it actually be so or not. No one lives and dies for what they know is a lie. They, additionally, were there to know the events, and were capable of telling them. That is all that is needed to establish facts: honest, competent witnesses who are in a position to know whereof they speak. Though the number of witnesses is important, the character of each witness is equally important.

Peter and Paul both were apostles, and both have something to say about the matter. I Peter 1:3 speaks of God's mercy through which Christians are born anew by means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ



from the dead. Ch. 2:21-24 plainly speaks of Jesus in his suffering and dying on our behalf, leading up to the resurrection. Ch. 3:21 reveals that it is the resurrection of Jesus which validates our burial and resurrection by immersion. II Peter 1:10 notes that the kingdom of Jesus is eternal, based upon the fact that he has gone into heaven (which event occurred following his resurrection), where all authority and power is subjected to him, I Pet. 3:22.

Paul, in like manner, builds his whole gospel doctrine upon three singular facts: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, I Cor. 15:1-4. He reveals that many were witnesses, as was he, of the resurrected Christ. Paul reasons that if any event could be established as fact, the resurrection could be. In fact, if the resurrection of Jesus cannot be considered a historical event, it would seem that no event could be shown to have happened. Paul's sermons, Acts 13, 17, are based upon this fact: God raised up Jesus from the dead.

Now it is a fact that some people may suffer hallucinations, as some have asserted the apostles and others did. But, under the circumstances revealed in the New Testament? We have appearances by Jesus in various areas, at various times of day and night, to many different people, singly and in groups. It does not seem very likely that everyone involved could have had the same hallucination, and that for only a short period of time (i.e. 40 days). It would seem that to accept such a "story" about all these people having the same hallucination would require more faith than to accept the resurrection itself.

In addition to these, Mark and Luke both record the predictions of Jesus regarding his impending death, burial and resurrection. Consider the following Scriptures along this line (we include Matthew for fullness): a) Mt. 16:21; Mk. 8:31-32; Lk. 9:22; b) Mt. 17:9; Mk. 9:9; c) Mt. 17:22-23; Mk. 9:31; Lk. 9:44; d) Lk. 17:25; e) Mt. 20:18-19; Mk. 10:33-34; Lk. 18:31-33; f) Mt. 26:1-2, 31-32; Mk. 14:8, 27-28. These Scriptures show that Jesus knew accurately what was going to happen to him, which included his resurrection on the third day. Luke's account in Acts shows that the major thrust of the Church was the conviction that Jesus was not in the tomb, but rather that he arose bodily, and was in heaven at God's right hand as Lord and Christ.

These accounts are sufficient to establish the facts about Jesus, especially concerning his crucifixion, burial and bodily resurrection.

Only those whose presuppositions rule out miracles can avoid the plain statements in these records. Some would argue that these witnesses are all "friendly" to Jesus. That may be true. But in courts of law, those whose testimony counts are those who were able to know the facts, and competent to tell said facts. The truth is what is asked for, regardless of from whom it comes.

Many have written to argue about the resurrection, since it is obviously the cornerstone of Christianity. All sorts of theories have been proposed, such as: a) the women went to the wrong tomb (but it was in a private tomb, and Joseph and Nicodemus knew where it was); b) Jesus didn't die, only swooned (who supposes that Roman soldiers don't know when someone is dead? Besides, Pilate made certain of his death before he let the body go); c) the disciples stole the body and told a lie (what manner of men would such be? Why do so anyway? How could they with a guard posted?); d) the disciples claimed a resurrection, mistaking someone else or something else for Jesus (but the accounts read otherwise; and how many could make such mistakes and yet convince others of the truth of such a story?); e) or that Jewish and/or Roman authorities removed the body (what for? And why did they not produce it when the disciples started proclaiming the resurrection of the "dead" man Jesus?); f) or that Jesus planned it all, making friends of such as the Roman soldiers, and using his own friends (like Judas!), he managed to "get himself" crucified, buried and resurrected (this makes him out an imposter, and his disciples proclaiming him as "truth" who in reality was like the devil: a liar).

All such theories have one thing in common: they are destroyed by the brutal facts. They are proposed by those to whom the bodily resurrection is either impossible (because miracles are) or distasteful to them (because it testifies to the deity of Jesus, a fact which surely makes all men obligated to accept or reject his lordship). As John Montgomery says in *Where is History Going*, pg. 53-54, the resurrection does not depend on (anyone's) theology, but only on evidence, factually reported, such as one used to decide anything. As he says of himself and C.S. Lewis, though both once were unbelieving, the facts considered honestly simply overwhelmed said unbelief and there was nothing left for them to do but accept the truth to which the facts pointed: Jesus arose from the tomb.

## B. SIGNIFICANCE

We now present at least some of the significant facts about the resurrection. Doubtless others could be given, but these are among all those which could be presented.

- a) It was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, such as in Psalms 16:8-10 and as seen in Acts 2:25-32.
- b) The conversion of the apostles from unbelieving scared men to bold trusting preachers, who could but speak that which they had seen and heard, which was from the beginning, testifying to all the eternal life in Jesus, who was with God and made manifest to men, to the end that all might have fellowship with them, each other and God himself (Acts 4:20; I John 1:1-5) can hardly be understood except in the light of the resurrection.
- c) Death was vanquished (Rom. 6:3-11; I Cor. 15:26-27, 54-57), and him who had the power of death (Heb. 2:14-18; 7:15-25) and life was/is possible (John 10:10b; 14:6; I John 5:11-12) in Jesus, who has the keys of death (Rev. 1:17-18; 5:15; 21:1-4).
- d) It was the confirmation by God of Jesus, both as to his word and character. Note Rom. 1:4: (Jesus) was designated as the Son of God with power . . . by his resurrection from the dead. If God cannot vanquish death, we might as well eat, drink and be merry, for we die . . . too! Much of Jesus' teaching was of a prophetic nature, either showing the fulfillment of prophecy about him (as in Luke 24:25ff.) or in respect to the future, much of the latter in regard to himself. Hence, the resurrection established the truthfulness of his claims, which in turn involved his deity. As an illustration, he predicted in Matthew 12:40 that he would be like Jonah. The resurrection verifies this prophecy. His insistence about the "third day" means: no "spiritual" resurrection, phantom-style, but the person that went in came out. He spoke in John 2:18-22 about this specifically.

He additionally claimed to exist before this life (before Abraham was, I am, Jn. 8:58) and to be equal with God (Jn. 5:17-18) which would involve no cessation of existence.

- His resurrection shows such to be so. Hence, as Thomas, we say, "My Lord and my God."
- e) It makes the cross a non-final event, thus not just the death and end of another dreamer, but rather the sacrifice of God for sinners. Indeed, Jesus was crucified for men's trespasses and raised for (men's) justification (Rom. 4:25), never to die again (Rom. 6:9).
  - f) It forms the historical basis of the Church's proclamation, and was/is so preached quite apart from men's faith in it or not. It is as if God said: "it's so, whether you agree or not." Men have so announced it to others since the Church began.
  - g) The beginning of the Church itself, the observance of Sunday rather than any other day of the week, the "Easter" event: all these are bound up together to show the significance of the resurrection of Jesus.

The fact is this: Jesus was A.W.O.L. from the tomb, notwithstanding all his enemies could do, or the unbelief of all his friends. Nothing else is sufficient to account for all the facts as we have them. The facts were proclaimed in Jerusalem, by convinced-against-their-own-belief-disciples, in plenty of time to produce contrary evidence, should it have been available, in a place where it could most easily have been shown false. When the proclamation was made, some accepted, some didn't. But the disbelief was because of other reasons than not enough evidence to prove a tomb empty of the body (though the grave clothes remained). If Jesus was deity, what tomb could hold him, anyway?

Thus the case stands. Twenty centuries have come and gone, but the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is the cardinal fact of Christianity, disbelieved but not disproved, denied by some and found wanting by others, but accepted and found satisfying for countless millions. One has only to honestly face the facts as they stand written to see clearly the case: Jesus arose bodily (we insist on the *same* body, not a different one. It is the *same* body that was crucified, with obvious marks to prove it, of which the accounts speak, not some glorified body which would prove nothing). Many classic examples could be cited of men who considered the facts and concluded, rightly: Jesus is alive. We, too, because he lives, shall

live. For in Him, we (really) live, and move, and have our being. What think ye of the Christ? Eternity is all that matters.

#### COLLATERAL READING

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