

Jesus' Miracles, Signs Of Divine Powers?

"This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in Him" (John 2:11).

Anyone who does not believe in God finds the concept of a miracle, any event that contradicts and even suspends the laws of nature, impossible to accept. That is, if God does not exist, only nature controls life. Therefore no miracle is possible and any account of a miracle cannot be true. This logical argument against miracles was first formulated by Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677). Spinoza's argument can be summarized as follows:

- A miracle violates natural laws.
- Natural laws are immutable.
- It is impossible to violate immutable laws.
- Therefore, miracles are impossible.

However, if God exists, He created the natural laws, so it should be no problem for Him to move beyond or outside these laws, nor can He be restrained by these laws.

Jesus used miracles as signs to his credentials as the Son of God. Without miracles it would be exceptionally difficult to believe His claims. As John wrote in John 20:30-31:

"Jesus' disciples saw Him do many more other miraculous signs besides the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him you will have life."

Observe that the miracles of Jesus not only showed His power over nature, but also revealed His approach to ministry: helping others, speaking with authority, and connecting with people. The keyword is compassion. Almost all His miracles were driven by compassion. He healed people who sought His help. He raised the dead to comfort grieving families. He quieted storms to calm the fears of His friends. He fed multitudes to avert their hunger. Don't fail to notice that Jesus never performed a miracle for His own benefit or gain. The miracles aided others, not Him. On five occasions Jesus performed a miracle as a sign solely for the disciples: walking on water; cursing of the fig tree; both miraculous catches of fish by the disciples; and the coin for the temple tax. All other miracles sprang from compassion for the people around Him.

The New Testament gospels record thirty-five miracles. Only one miracle (the feeding of the five thousand) is described in every gospel. About half of the miracles are recorded in two or more of the gospels. As expected, quite a few, eleven in fact, are shared between all the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), but only seven are recorded in only two of the three synoptic accounts. Two miracles in John also appear in one or more of the synoptic gospels. Matthew has three unique miracles, Mark has two, while Luke and John each record six.

This distribution once more demonstrates Matthew, Mark, and Luke are personal testimonies. Even Mark, the gospel "copied" by Matthew and Luke, has two miracles not mentioned in the other two. Why are they omitted if Matthew and Luke leaned on Mark as their primary source as the synoptic theory claims?

As miracles are evidence of Jesus deity, it is useful to categorize them into:

- Healing miracles: The vast majority (26) of miracles in which Jesus heals one person or more or even raises (Jairus' daughter, a widow's son and Lazarus) from the dead.
- Nature miracles: Nine miracles are recorded where Jesus does something impossible simply within our natural world. He defied the laws of nature.

The healing miracles are easy targets for critics. Many simply insist that the healed person was not ill, the person might be "self-healed" (the "power of positive thinking") or there might even have been a type of hypnosis or other "magic." Obviously our ancestors did not have our knowledge of science, but they were not stupid either! Even a first century uneducated Jew could distinguish between a magician's trick and a genuine miracle. They would have identified a fake healing. The healed people were not selected from the audience willingly participating in a performance. These were locals, known by the community for their handicaps, perhaps long-term blindness or injury. Resurrecting someone moments after his death would suggest he had not actually died. Lazarus, however, was in the grave four days (John 11:39: "'But, Lord,' said Martha, the sister of the dead man, 'by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.'"), so one can hardly argue that "he was not really dead."

Still, from an evidence perspective, the most awesome confirmations of Jesus' deity are the nature miracles. There is just no explanation for walking

on water, calming a storm, feeding huge crowds from a single lunch box, or turning water into wine. Such events are real miracles and they show Jesus' divine power. Keep in mind that such miracles have never been claimed by other professed miracle workers. Only Jesus has displayed such power. Look closely at the nature miracles and probe them for the characteristics for a genuine miracle. We learn:

- **Significance:** There is no doubt the nature miracles are significant. It is unlikely that anyone present was not awed! This is clear from people's reactions, such as when Jesus climbed into the boat after walking on the water: "Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Matthew 14:33). After Jesus calmed the storm: "In fear and amazement they asked one another, 'Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him'" (Luke 8:25).
- **Immediate:** All of Jesus' miracles had immediate results. Both healings and nature miracles were instantaneous.
- **Defy the laws of nature:** This cannot be disputed, for this is the exact definition of a miracle.
- **Multiple witnesses:** As a last resort, non-believing critics try to refute Jesus' nature miracles by dismissing them as myths or legends. However, the evidence is overwhelming. First, the miracles were done in groups of varying sizes, either the disciples (one can argue they are not objective) or a crowd of several thousands. Second, five of the nature miracles are recorded in multiple gospels, one even in all four gospels. Third, Jesus' opponents never denied or even disputed his miracles. They admitted Jesus performed miracles and tried to claim Jesus had teamed with the devil: "But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons'" (Matthew 12:24). Or they tried to destroy the evidence: "So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him" (John 12:10-11).

Among all miracles the astonishing feeding of a crowd of five thousand men plus women and children, likely a total of ten to twelve thousand or more people, stands out.

This may well be the most impressive nature miracle of all. Some see a symbolic link between Jesus as the "Bread of Life" and God's gift of manna to the Israelites in the desert long before.

Second, it is the only miracle found in all four gospels. Each describes the events on that hillside near the Sea of Galilee: only five loaves and two fishes to feed the large gathering. Jesus broke the bread and the disciples handed out the food. There was enough for everybody and the leftovers filled twelve baskets. Comparing the four accounts is rewarding. As to be expected with eyewitness recollection, they all describe the same storyline, but each provides different details. For instance, Mark and John estimated "eight months of a man's wages" would be necessary to feed all the people. All gospels relate that the people were to be seated, but only Mark and Luke tell they sat in groups of "fifties and hundreds." John mentions the Sea of Galilee, Mark and Matthew just mention a boat, and Luke adds that they are close to a town called Bethsaida. John also reveals it was a boy who had brought along the Barley loaves and fishes. John identified a number of disciples by name. Again there is a random pattern of details in the various gospels. Contrary to synoptic theory, Mark, supposed to be the briefest and simplest gospel, actually has the most extensive account with the most details. A total of four independent witness accounts to this remarkable event.

Third and last, this miracle is performed in the presence of five thousand men, not counting women and children. Nothing was done in secret. It was born out of compassion for the hungry crowd, but the number of witnesses is momentous. And at least three of the four gospels were written within a generation of this event, many of these witnesses were still alive as these accounts began to circulate. There were plenty of opportunities for someone to confirm or deny this miracle.

In the words of famous Christian philosopher, theologian and author G.K. Chesterton:

"The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen."

About the Author

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