

Why Trust the Bible - Week 7

Chapter 6: So Did It Happen?

Week 6 Highlights

- We reviewed and debunked 4 alternate reasons that the New Testament authors would have written what they did, other than be trustworthy authors of truth.
 - They were writing fiction
 - They were purposely being deceitful
 - They were deceived themselves
 - They were simply confused.
- We dove into reasons we don't believe that the New Testament authors were being deceitful, being deceived themselves, or were simply confused about what they experienced.
- We discussed the apologetics bonus topic of "How old is the earth?". This included why it matters, differences in biblical opinions and scientific dating methodologies.

What is a Miracle?

1. an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs
 - *the healing miracles described in the Gospels*
2. an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment
 - *The bridge is a miracle of engineering.*

Craig Keener, author of *Miracles Today: The Supernatural Work of God in the Modern World*, says "Believers recognize God's activity in all creation; existence, life, and DNA are all larger expressions of **divine action** than most miracle accounts I report. These are so pervasive and happen with such regularity that people consider them "**ordinary**." In the Bible, though, God also acts in special or "**extraordinary**" ways in history and people's lives to reveal himself and get people's attention... We call these events **miracles**."

Chapter Questions

The author writes, "You can't just declare miracles - and therefore the Bible - to be implausible simply on the strength of your own experience or lack thereof" (pg 107). Why is it not necessarily implausible to believe in miracles?

Just because you haven't witnessed or experienced something yourself doesn't mean it didn't happen.

What is wrong with the *scientific* objection to miracles?

Scientific objection: Is it possible that the witnesses of Biblical miracles just didn't understand science enough to know that what they were seeing was not miraculous?

This is actually a backwards way to look at this because science actually cannot prove that supernatural events have not nor cannot happen. Science cannot prove with certainty that there is no God - omnipotent creator of all - therefore it cannot prove that miracles are impossible.

What is wrong with the philosophical objection to miracles?

Philosophical Objection: Even if science cannot prove the impossibility of miracles, we should still say that the probability of miracles is too small to believe that they are possible.

The fact is, if you ran probabilities to determine everything that is or is not possible, then you would have to doubt everything that is unusual or uncommon.

Why Do So Many Say Miracles Are Impossible?

This goes back to the Enlightenment period (18th century), but the idea was popularized especially by Scottish philosopher, David Hume's, essay against miracles (1748).

The Scientific Objection

- Hume defines miracles as violations of natural law. He also defines natural law as something that can't be violated. Therefore, his very definitions effectively define miracles out of existence.
 - His idea of natural law borrows from Isaac Newton and early proponents of Newtonian science. They, however, believed not only that God established nature's laws but also that he transcended them and could act within nature as he pleased.

The Philosophical Objection

- Hume's second argument against miracles is that uniform human experience should predispose us to doubt all claims about miracles. The *uniformity of nature* philosophy is the principle that the course of nature continues uniformly the same, e.g. if X is the cause Y, then Y will necessarily exist whenever X exists. In particular, the uniformities observed in the past will hold for the present and future as well.
 - How uniform is human experience though?

Chapter Question

Lots of miracles have been recorded throughout history. Why ought we believe the Bible's and not the rest? Why are Jesus' miracles plausible?

The miracles recorded in the Bible are essential to the stories around them. In particular, in the New Testament, they are deeply connected to the message Jesus was proclaiming.

According to Pastor Bob Deffinbaugh, Biblical miracles are differentiated from those proclaimed by other religions or secular observers by their *characteristics* and their *purpose*.

Characteristics of Biblical Miracles

(1) *They were truly historical.* In the Gospel accounts, the writers have not presented the miracles of our Lord as anything other than actual events. They are not true myths, mythical stories with 'spiritual lessons,' but real events conveying spiritual truths. The miracles of other religions are far more mythical in nature. Though perhaps not precisely stated, we can sense a kind of 'once upon a time' mood. Not so in the Gospels.

(2) *They were reasonable.* The miracles of the Apocryphal Gospels are fantastic and questionable. They are completely out of character, with Jesus arbitrarily and impulsively using His supernatural powers. In contrast, the Gospels show a highly ethical use of His power, in a way totally consistent with His person.

(3) *They were useful.* Almost every miracle of our Lord was designed to meet a physical need. Our Lord refused to employ His powers to satisfy His own appetites, or to ensure His protection. He turned down every invitation to do the miraculous to satisfy idle curiosity (cf. Luke 23:8).

(4) *They were accomplished openly.* The miracles were performed in the most public situations, not oft in a dark corner. While so many alleged 'miracles' of today defy documentation, those of our Lord were mainly public.

(5) *They were accomplished simply.* Others who claimed to be 'miracle workers' always operated with a great deal of ritual and ceremony. A 'miracle' was an extravaganza, a carrying-on with pomp and circumstance. Our Lord most often merely spoke a word, and at times performed His miraculous deeds at a distance (cf. Matthew 8:5-13).

(6) *They were accomplished instantly.* With very few exceptions, the miracles of Jesus were completed instantly and completely.

(7) *They were accomplished in a variety of circumstances.* While some could do their deeds only under the most controlled environment, Jesus did His works under a great variety of circumstances. His powers were demonstrated over nature, over sickness and disease, and over the forces of Satan. The sicknesses He healed were of amazing variety.

(8) *They were accomplished on the basis of faith.* The miracles of the Gospels were accomplished on the basis of faith, either that of our Lord (cf. John 11:41-43), or of the one cured (cf. Mark 5:34), or of others who are concerned (cf. Matthew 8:10, Mark 2:5). Where there was little faith, little was accomplished (cf. Mark 6:5,6).

(9) *They were gratuitous.* While in the cults, a fee of payments was expected, the miracles of our Lord were free of charge. No fee was expected or accepted. Our Lord's ministry, from start to finish, was one of grace.

(10) *They were free from retaliation.* With the possible exception of the cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:12-14) none of the miracles of Jesus were of a punitive or negative variety. This is in contrast, not only to the desires of his own disciples (Luke 9:52-56), but also the practices of other 'healers' of His day, and even of what often occurred in the Old Testament.

(11) *They were eschatological.* The miracles of Jesus were evidence of the dawn of a new age. With the presentation of Jesus as Messiah, a new age had begun. He had come to restore man from his fallen state, and creation from the chaos resulting from sin. He had come to restore and to save. Man had been placed on the earth to rule over it. When the last Adam (Jesus Christ) came, nature immediately recognized its master. When our Lord confronted sickness and disease He mastered it. He came to save, and thus the word often used for healing was 'to save.'

The Purpose of Biblical Miracles

(1) *They attracted men.* Though not the primary thrust of our Lord's miraculous ministry, one outcome was that His miracles attracted men and women who were anxious to hear His message. To many, His deeds were at least those of a prophet (cf. John 3:2; 4:19). Here was a man with a message from God.

Our Lord made many attempts to avoid the spectacular and to arouse misdirected Messianic hopes (Matthew 8:4; 12:16; 16:20, etc.). But we must also recall that it was the miraculous healing ministry of Jesus which drew the multitudes to the place where the Sermon on the Mount was delivered (Matthew 4:24-25).

(2) *They accredited Jesus as the promised Messiah.* It was expected that when the Messiah came, He would be accredited by miracles. When our Lord presented Himself at the synagogue in Nazareth, He quoted a passage from Isaiah chapter 61:

"And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord'" (Luke 4:17-19) .

The people expected Messiah to present Himself by signs (John 7:31). Our Lord's power over demons demonstrates the coming of the Kingdom: "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). By reason of His work alone, men should receive Him as Messiah (John 10:37-38).

(3) *They reveal God.* The miracles of Jesus were not merely deeds to authenticate the message of the Messiah, but a vital part of that message. The miracles not only revealed the power of God, but His person. In the miracles of Jesus we see the sympathy and compassion of God. Jesus was deeply moved by human suffering and need (cf. John 11:35). These needs prompted Him to action. Again, the miracles reveal Jesus to be the Redeemer and Restorer of a fallen universe. He came to save.

Chapter Questions

The author writes, “If the resurrection happened, then the rest of the fundamental superstructure of Christianity comes together like clockwork - including the authority of the Bible, both New Testament and Old” (pg 114).

Have you thought about the resurrection in this way before? Why is its truthfulness essential for Christianity?

If Jesus is still dead, then he wasn't the Christ, and the rest of the New Testament wouldn't matter.

Why did the disciples themselves believe in Jesus' resurrection?

1. The empty tomb
2. The appearance of the resurrected Jesus in the physical form of the same Jesus they knew.

Why can't the resurrection be ignored?

You can't say that NOTHING happened. Obviously, SOMETHING had to have happened, because it created shockwaves around the world and throughout the history of 2000 years.

From pages 118-121, the author lists several alternative explanations to the resurrection. List them here. Are any of them compelling to you? Why does each explanation fail?

- The women went to the wrong tomb - Authorities could have produced a corpse if this was the case.
- Jesus didn't really die - A man who was tortured and severely injured the way Jesus was couldn't have moved about the way the resurrected Jesus did, convincing disciples he was a resurrection.
- The disciples stole the body of Jesus - The disciples wouldn't have died for such a hoax.
- It could have been a mass hallucination - We already debunked this absurd idea.
- Perhaps they were overwhelmed by a dream or vision - The stories told around the resurrection have the characteristics of eyewitness accounts, not of spiritual metaphors. Additionally, a dream or vision would not have given rise to the movement that was to come considering how the Jewish people viewed dreams/visions.

“Why would the apostles lie?... Liars always lie for selfish reasons. If they lied, what was their motive, what did they get out of it? What they got out of it was misunderstanding, rejection, persecution, torture, and martyrdom. Hardly a list of perks!” - Peter Kreeft, PhD, Professor of Philosophy at Boston College

What are the implications of a resurrected Jesus? List them below.

The early Christians did not invent the empty tomb or resurrected Jesus in order to explain a faith they already had. They developed that faith BECAUSE OF the occurrence and convergence of these two phenomena.

- If the resurrection really did happen, then our confidence in the Bible is catapulted to a new level.
- If Jesus was really resurrected from the dead then the Bible is the Word of God.

"I think the alternative explanations, which try to account for the spread of Christianity through sociological or psychological reasons, are very weak... For me, the historical evidence has reinforced my commitment to Jesus Christ as the Son of God who loves us and died for us and was raised from the dead. It's that simple." - Edwin Yamauchi, Miami University of Ohio, PhD Mediterranean Studies (excerpt taken from *A Case for Christ*).

Apologetics Bonus: A Note on the Deity of Jesus

John the Baptist, in prison and struggling, sends his followers to ask Jesus about his identity:

Now when John heard in prison what the Christ was doing, he sent a message through his disciples and asked him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" - Matthew 11:2-3

Jesus doesn't give a straightforward answer, but replies:

*"Go and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with leprosy[a] are cleansed, the deaf hear, **the dead are raised**, and the poor are told the good news, and blessed is the one who isn't offended by me."* - Matthew 11:4-5

Jesus' response is an allusion to Isaiah 35: 5-6

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will sing for joy.

And Isaiah 61:1

The Spirit of the Lord God is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to the prisoners;

For years, many questioned Jesus' addition of **"the dead are raised,"** as it is absent from the Old Testament text.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 finally revealed some astonishing answers to this question.

Manuscript **4Q521** dates back to thirty years before Jesus was born and contains this phrase in Isaiah 61! In Hebrew, it is embedded in a messianic context and refers to the wonders that the Messiah will do when he comes and when heaven and earth will obey him.

John the Baptist would have instantly recognized Jesus' words as a distinct claim to be the Messiah.

Could the discovery of these scrolls have been just another modern-day miracle?