

Miracles



D L Stephens

Thoughts on the existence
of miracles, the nature of
Providence and whether
miracles have ceased.

Miracles

By

D. L. Stephens

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Miracles

The Frenchman whose penname was Voltaire reputedly said, “If a miracle occurred in the marketplace of Paris and in the presence of two thousand men, I would rather disbelieve my own eyes than the two thousand. Voltaire’s words reveal important considerations about the occurrences of miracles: (1) Voltaire was willing to accept the testimony of an overwhelming number of witnesses when their testimony contradicted his own; witnesses are important, (2) some men believe on the basis of the testimony of others when the testimony is conclusive, and (3) by inference, some men will not believe despite overwhelming witness testimony in favor of belief.¹

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Jesus described the mindset of the skeptic. In the story the Rich Man, who had died and gone to the place of torment, begged Abraham to send someone to warn his brothers not to follow him to torment. He said,

Luke 16:30 “... ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31 “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

A skeptic is likely to remain skeptical even in the presence of a miracle. It is not a matter of showing him a miracle of sufficient wonder to cause his belief. The skeptic does not and will not believe because his will is set against belief.

Even so, the certainty of the occurrence of miracles does not rest on a person’s willingness to believe, not of the skeptic nor of the one who believes too readily. A skeptic cannot disprove the occurrence of a miracle merely because he does not believe it happened. Nor is it confirmed by someone who discards ordinary doubt and eagerly believes. Perhaps worse is the commiserating soul who says in support, “If you believe it was a miracle then it was a miracle.”

¹ Michael P. Green, *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1990, p. 22.

Consider the next two examples of occurrences that many have called miraculous.

Mark 5:22 And one of the synagogue officials named **Jairus** came up, and upon seeing Him, fell at His feet, 23 and entreated Him earnestly, saying, “My little daughter is at the point of death; *please* come and lay Your hands on her, that she may get well and live.” 24 And He went off with him; and a great multitude was following Him and pressing in on Him.

Mark 5:35 While He was still speaking, they came from the *house* of the synagogue official, saying, “**Your daughter has died**; why trouble the Teacher anymore?” 36 But Jesus, overhearing what was being spoken, said to the synagogue official, “Do not be afraid *any longer*, only believe.” 37 And He allowed no one to follow with Him, except Peter and James and John the brother of James. 38 And they came to the house of the synagogue official; and He beheld **a commotion**, and *people loudly weeping and wailing*. 39 And entering in, He said to them, “Why make a commotion and weep? **The child has not died, but is asleep.**” 40 And *they began laughing* at Him. But putting them all out, He took along the child’s father and mother and His own companions, and entered *the room* where the child was. 41 And taking the child by the hand, He said to her, “**Talitha kum!**” (which translated means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise!”). 42 And immediately the girl rose and *began* to walk; for **she was twelve** years old. And immediately **they were completely astounded**. 43 And He gave them strict orders that no one should know about this; and He said that *something* should be **given her to eat**.

- Was she dead or merely sleeping?
- Why did the messengers say, “Your daughter has died.”?
- Why were the mourners weeping and wailing?
- Why did they ridicule the statement, “The child has not died, but is asleep.”?
- Why were the witnesses astounded after Jesus raised her up?

- Why did Jesus even see a need to take witnesses if the girl was not already dead?
- If she were merely asleep then why did Jesus give them strict orders to tell no one? Could they not have said, “She was merely asleep.”?

Now consider the story of another little girl who was sick,

Ray Stedman has told the story of a time when he and his wife were driving through Oregon with his little daughter, Susan. She had developed a fever the night before when they were staying in a motel, but it didn't seem serious. As they drove along, all of a sudden the little girl went into convulsions. Her eyes turned up, her body began to jerk, and she obviously was in great danger. Stedman immediately stopped the car, grabbed Susan, and crossed the road to a farmhouse that happened to be visible nearby. It was about six in the morning, but Stedman was frantic. When a woman appeared, he said, "My daughter is very sick-she's in convulsions. Do you have a bathtub where we can put her in warm water?"

The lady was taken aback and hardly knew what to say. She motioned down the hall, and without waiting for any words, Stedman pushed the front door open, went down the hall, and started running water in the tub. Later he called a doctor and arranged to take his daughter to him for an examination.

It turned out all right, but Stedman later found out that this farm family had the only bathtub and the only phone for miles around!²

Which of these do you think was a miracle? One or both? How do you know?

Sometimes it is difficult to tell if a miracle occurred.

- A point to remember is that a miracle cannot be explained by natural causes.
- Providence on the other hand usually can be explained by natural causes.
- Both, however, involve the supernatural.

² Ibid., Michael P. Green.

What is a miracle?

1. **Three terms are used in the New Testament** to denote miracles. They are called "**wonders**," primarily in reference to the astonishment they produce; "**powers**," as related to the divine energy of which they are an expression; and "**signs**," indicating God's presence, and of the sanction He affords to the teacher or to what is taught.

sign: σημεῖον - (semeion) *a sign* consisting of a *wonder* or *miracle*, an event that is contrary to the usual course of nature.

wonder: τέρας - (teras) *prodigy, portent, omen, wonder* in our literature only plural and combined with σημεῖα.

miracle: δύναμις - (dynamis) *power, might, strength, force*; of the outward expressions of power: *deed of power, miracle, wonder*.

2. Definition of "miracle":

e. Kreeft and Tacelli in their book on Apologetics say that a miracle is: a striking and religiously significant intervention of God in the system of natural causes.³

In this article we are not investigating whether miracles are happening today. We are investigating whether they have ever happened at all.

Our focus: is it reasonable to believe the accounts in the New Testament about the miracles of Jesus?

- Materialistic scientists and modernists say "No."
- Believers in theism say, "Yes."
- The problem is: science has adopted naturalism as its guiding philosophy, and naturalism says there are no miracles.

³ Kreeft, P., and Tacelli, R., *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, p. 109.

- Naturalism says that nature is a completely closed, interlocked system of causes and effects.
- The scientist who believes in naturalism must always look for a natural cause for every event.
- This is a bias against miracles.

[**Naturalism** denies that anything in reality has a supernatural significance; specifically, naturalism is the idea that cause-and-effect laws (as of chemistry and physics) are adequate to account for all phenomena, and that ideas about purpose in nature are invalid.]

Science and Miracle.

A miracle is not a contradiction of the laws of nature. The idea of miracles assumes, rather than sets aside, the idea that nature is a system of natural causes normally predictable by law. This is because, unless there are regular and predictable causes and effects, there can be no exception to them.

1. Can Science disprove miracles?

a. A miracle explained is not a miracle.

Author and writer F. Bettex well said that, "Science treats of things that can be known. The miracle, on the other hand, according to its name and nature, is something that is inexplicable and cannot be known. Therefore **science and the miracle have nothing in common** with each other. **A miracle scientifically explained is a contradiction.**"⁴

The great physicist John Tyndal, though a skeptic, said: "If there is a God, it is plain that he can perform miracles. **Science however has**

⁴ F. Bettex, *The Miracle*, p. 33.

not to treat of the miracle; because, if it exists, it lies without her sphere.”⁵

- The miracle cannot be verified by science. Neither can it be denied. A miracle is outside the province of science.

b. To deny miracles is to claim all knowledge.

F. Bettex also said: **To deny miracles is equivalent to the assertion, "We, who have dwelt upon the earth only since yesterday already know all laws, all forces, all possibilities of the universe ... Human knowledge will never be competent to decide what is possible."**⁶ (To deny existence on the grounds that one has never observed the phenomenon is *Argumentum ad Ignoratium*—i.e., our ignorance of how to prove or disprove a proposition does not establish either the truth or falsity of the proposition.)

- Our ignorance of how to prove the existence of miracles does not mean that miracles do not exist, or never have. For example, to say, “I have never seen a miracle; therefore, there aren’t any.” Or, “Competent people have never observed a miracle; therefore, there are no miracles,” commits the logical fallacy of *Argumentum ad Ignoratium*.
- One cannot examine every event in history to prove there were no miracles.

⁵ (Fragments, new edition), *ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶ Bettex, *ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

Objections to Miracles.

1. Miracles violate the uniformity of nature.

John C. McCampbell wrote in the Foreword of *The Genesis Flood*,

Uniformitarianism is the belief that existing physical processes, acting essentially as at present, are sufficient to account for all past changes and for the present state of the astronomic, geologic and biologic universe. The principle of uniformity in *present* processes is both scientific and Scriptural (Genesis 8:22), but comes into conflict with Biblical revelation when utilized to deny the possibility of *past* or *future* miraculous suspension or alteration of those processes by their Creator.⁷

To say, “**Miracles violate the principle of the uniformity of nature,**” is to say that we can explain whatever happens completely in terms of the system of natural causes. This is equivalent to saying, “**Miracles violate the principle that miracles never happen.**” I.e., *Petitio Principii, it Begs the Question—a logical fallacy and an error in reasoning.*

- The principle of uniformity is not absolute.
- The principle of uniformity should not be applied without qualification.
- If there are miracles it is proof that there is an exception to the principle of uniformity.
- If God is omnipotent He is able to work miracles.
- If God is willing to work a miracle, (This depends on His free choice.) then it is likely that there are miracles.
- If God created nature, (If God can make a “Big Bang” then He can certainly make a small one,) then He is certainly capable of lesser creations.

⁷ John C. Whitcomb, Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood*, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Philadelphia, 1961. p. xx.

2. Miracles violate the laws of nature.

A miracle does not “violate” the laws of nature.

For example, if a **school principal** suspends gym class for a special assembly that would not be a violation. The principal merely has exercised his prerogative as principal. The principal has the authority to change schedules; whereas, for example, a substitute homeroom teacher probably does not.

An airplane does not “violate” the laws of gravity. The airplane employs other laws that are able to overcome the gravity.

A Divine miracle violates nothing. God merely exercises His authority for that occasion.

3. Miracles violate the scientific method.

Natural science operates by assuming certain things as given: it assumes the world of matter exists, with natural causes operating within that world; further, science assumes there is order and regularity. These assumptions make some empirical investigation possible, and outcomes predictable.

These assumptions are merely for problem solving. And, necessarily, the scientific method is limited in its scope.

The scientific method cannot answer questions such as, “Why does matter exist at all?” or “What is the ultimate cause of everything?”

- Science (i.e., the scientific method) treats of things that can be known by experiment.
- Science assumes that the universe is governed by fixed laws.
- Miracles do not violate the scientific method; miracles are outside the scope of the scientific method.

This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it can lead to false conclusions if a person assumes that a higher authority cannot set the laws of nature aside to accomplish another purpose.

- Science can lead to a materialistic view of the universe if it is applied without qualification.

4. Miracles are an affront to the glory of God.

This argument would be true only if God created a universe in which He should never intervene.

This would be a world in which He never answered prayers, or never revealed Himself in special ways.

Are Miracles Possible?

- Whether a person believes that miracles are possible or not will depend on his worldview.

A person's worldview forms a conceptual framework within which ideas and learning take place. For example, if a person's philosophy excludes the supernatural then they will always say that the event was an illusion, or that the report of the miracle came from people who were victims of an illusion. The person who does not believe in the existence of God, or who believes there is a God, but that God does not intervene in nature, is one whose conceptual framework will prevent him from believing that a miracle has occurred. For this reason, the difficulty of philosophy must be settled before one can examine the evidence for miracles.

1. Considering God as Creator.

If there is a Creator God, then He is all-powerful, and thus can work miracles.

Whether to work a miracle would be God's free choice.

Such a God could not be compelled or prevented from working a miracle.

Since there is not an obstacle to miracles in God, then if there is a God, miracles are possible.

2. Considering the Creation.

If God created nature then it is open to the possibility of containing miracles. (If God can make a Big Bang then He can surely make a Little Bang.)

If the Creation is dependent on God for its very existence, then it is dependent on him for whatever He might want to do to it. (For example, if the Author can create the play, then he can surely change it.)

Since the Creation is open to the possibility, and is dependent on God, then miracles are possible.

Jesus and Miracles.

The following is a review of three miracles Jesus performed.

Feeding the 5000 – Matt. 14:13; Mark. 6:35; Luke 9:12; John 6:5.

Healing the paralytic – Matthew 9:1; Mark. 2:1; Luke 5:17.

Raising of Lazarus of Bethany – John 11:43.

Note: The proof for the occurrence of miracles rests on the same type of proof offered in a court of law. The classic means of proof are witnesses, documents, and real evidence. In some cases experts are included.

The Miracles of Jesus

The Feeding of the 5000

- (John) Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.
- (Matthew) Multitudes followed Jesus on foot to a desolate place. (Mark) There was a great multitude. (Luke) It was a desolate place. (John) A great multitude followed Him.
- The Feast of the Passover was at hand.
- (Matthew) The multitudes became hungry; it was past time for a meal. (Mark) It was quite late. The place was desolate. Food for such a multitude would cost 200 denarii (about 200 days wages). (Luke) The day began to

decline. (John) Two hundred denarii was the estimate for the cost of the food the multitude would need.

- (Luke) The Twelve asked Jesus to send the multitude away.
- (John) There was a boy there with five barley loaves and two fish.
- (Matthew) Jesus had them recline on the grass. (Mark) Jesus had them recline in groups of hundreds and fifties. (John) There was much grass in the place.
- (Matthew) Jesus took five loaves and two fish, gave thanks and broke it. (Mark) They had five loaves and two fish only. Jesus fed them from the five loaves and two fish. (Luke) They had only five loaves and two fish. (John) Jesus fed them with the five loaves and two fish.
- (Matthew) The entire multitude ate and all were satisfied. (Mark) They all ate and were satisfied. (Luke) Jesus fed the multitude from the five loaves and two fish. They all ate and were satisfied.
 - This was not a symbolic meal.
- (Matthew) There was a remnant of bread, twelve full baskets. (Luke) The broken pieces left over amounted to twelve baskets full. (John) They gathered up the fragments that were left, twelve baskets.
- This means that everyone ate from an abundance.
- (Matthew) There were 5000 men who ate, plus women and children. (Mark) There were five thousand men who ate the loaves. (John) There were five thousand men.
- (John) The people who ate believed it was a miracle.

Why was this a miracle?

- In this case the quantity of food available originally was inadequate to feed the multitude.
- Causality: an effect cannot be quantitatively greater than its cause. For example: a 1 lb. Cake mix cannot make a 50 lb. cake. For this to take place the law of causality has to be set aside. Only God can set aside the law of cause and effect.

The healing of the paralytic –

Matt. 9:1; Mark 2:1; Luke 5:17.

- (Mark) Jesus came to Capernaum.
- (Mark) Many were gathered there; there was no room even near the door because of the people. (Luke) There were Pharisees and teachers of the law present from every village of Galilee and Judaea and from Jerusalem. (Luke) There was a crowd.
- Not just uneducated people. Not easily deceived.
- Not just one or two, but many witnesses.
- (Matthew) They brought the paralytic who was lying on a bed. (Mark) They brought a paralytic to Him; they had to let down the paralytic and his pallet through the roof because of the crowd. (Luke) They let down the paralytic through the tiles on his stretcher, into the center, in front of Jesus.
- (Matthew) Scribes were there. (Mark) There were some scribes there.
- (Matthew) Jesus healed him with a word. (Mark) Jesus healed the paralytic with a word. (Luke) Jesus healed the paralytic with a word.
 - No medicine. No physical treatment.
- (Mark) The former paralytic went out in the sight of all. (Luke) The man who was healed rose up at once; he carried his stretcher and went home.
- (Mark) The crowd was amazed and glorified God. (Luke) The crowd were seized with astonishment and filled with fear. “We have seen remarkable things today.”

Why was this a miracle?

- In the information technology business there is a painful awareness that the output of a computer system cannot be any better than the input. GIGO as they say, garbage in and garbage out. The flip side of this rule is, the quality out cannot exceed the quality in.

- If there is an exceptional increase in quality in the output, it had to be somewhere in the input.
- In Causality: the cause must be necessary and sufficient; and the effect cannot be qualitatively greater than the cause.
- In this case a paralyzed man, who was brought in on his bed, left in good health carrying his bed, and the only visible cause was that Jesus restored his health with a word.
- That is a miracle.

The raising of Lazarus of Bethany, John 11:1 – 47.

John 11:1 Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 And it was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.

14 Then Jesus therefore said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, 15 and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him.”

- Lazarus of Bethany fell sick and died.

John 11:17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning *their* brother. 20 Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him; but Mary still sat in the house. 21 Martha therefore said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 “Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother shall rise again.” 24 Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” 27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed

that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world.”

- Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days.
- There were many Jews there besides Martha and Mary, and the Apostles; i.e., many witnesses.
- The name of the town is given: Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem.

John 11:30 Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha met Him. 31 The Jews then who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Therefore, when Mary came where Jesus was, she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, “Lord, if You had been here, **my brother would not have died.**” 33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her, *also* weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled...

- Mary believed that Lazarus was dead.
- Others believed that Lazarus was dead.

John 11:38 Jesus therefore again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, “Remove the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been *dead* four days.” 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” 41 And so they removed the stone. And Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest Me. 42 “And I knew that Thou hearest Me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.” 43 And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” 44 He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

- The tomb was a cave with a stone lying against it.

- Mary believed there would be an odor—from decay.
- Jesus used words only.
- Lazarus came forth still bound with grave wrappings.

John 11:45 Many therefore of the Jews, who had come to Mary and beheld what He had done, believed in Him. 46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things which Jesus had done.

- Many of the Jews believed in Him because of what He did.

John 12:9 The great multitude therefore of the Jews learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.

- A great multitude came to see Lazarus after Jesus raised him.
- Did the authorities in Jerusalem rejoice because Jesus had raised Lazarus of Bethany from the dead? No.

10 But the chief priests took counsel that they might put Lazarus to death also; 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away, and were believing in Jesus.

- The fact that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead was not the greatest concern of the chief priests.
- The chief priests and Pharisees wanted to suppress the news and prevent more people from believing in Jesus.

John 11:47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For **this man is performing many signs**. 48 “If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

- The Jewish Great Sanhedrin said Jesus is “...performing many signs.”
- These were His enemies.
- Judging from the circumstances where the event occurred, from the variety and quality of the

witnesses, and from the results wrought by the event, it is clear that the raising of Lazarus of Bethany was a miracle of stunning proportions.

What Quadratus said about the miracles of Jesus,

"The works of our Saviour were always conspicuous, for they were real; both they that were healed, and they that were raised from the dead; who were seen not only when they were healed or raised, but for a long time afterward; not only while He dwelled on this earth, but also after his departure, and for a good while after it, insomuch that some of them have come down to our own time."⁸

- The miracles of Jesus could not be denied.
- Many of those He benefited lived on after His crucifixion.

Why was this considered a miracle?

- Lazarus of Bethany died. He was a man known by his community.
- Lazarus of Bethany had two sisters, both of whom believed Lazarus to be dead.
- Members of the community believed Lazarus to be dead.
- They wrapped him in burial cloth and buried him in a tomb. He remained buried four days after his death.
- They sealed his tomb with a stone.
- Martha believed there would be an odor—from decay.
- Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead by speaking to him.
- Lazarus' resurrection stunned the community.
- A great multitude came to see Lazarus after Jesus raised him. If there could have been a contradiction of the fact of the miracle this would have been the time for it to arise.

⁸ Paley, Willaim., *A View to the Evidences of Christianity*, p. 84, p.91.

- Science can provide no explanation of how Jesus could raise Lazarus from the dead merely by calling him forth from the tomb.

The utter impossibility—in human terms—of what Jesus did was expressed by the king of Israel centuries before in his response to a letter from the king of Aram. The king of Aram asked the king of Israel to heal Naaman of his leprosy. The Bible says,

2 Kings 5:7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending word to me to cure a man of his leprosy?”

He knew that only God can kill and make alive again.

Revelation and the Miracle.

1. Miracles are possible.

- a. Macartney: "When you face this question of miracles, it all depends upon what kind of a god you believe in, and whether or not you spell his name with a capital 'G'."⁹

2. Miracles are probable.

- a. Admit God and miracles become possible. Acknowledge sin, and the intervention of God on man's behalf becomes probable, and upon the probability of God's intervention on man's behalf rests the probability of miracles; for miracles and redemption by revelation go hand in hand.

⁹ C. E. Macartney, *Christian Faith and the Spirit of the Age*, pp. 70, 71.

- b. Orr: "Do the difficulties attaching to the idea of miracle, or to its proof, justify us in rejecting the miracles pertaining to the biblical revelation?"¹⁰
- c. Fisher: "The anterior (that is, the leading) probability that a revelation will be given lies in the necessitous condition of man and the benevolent character of God."¹¹

3. The need of revelation is then suggested by Professor Fisher under four points:

- a. "The first is the vagueness and uncertainty of man's knowledge, under the light of nature, of God and divine things." pp. 22, 23.
- b. "There is a sense of guilt which reveals itself in the rites of the religions of the heathen nations. It is the consciousness of being unreconciled to the power on whom we depend and to whom a more or less distinct feeling of responsibility prevails among mankind." p. 24.
- c. "There is a bondage of habit which often gives rise to an ineffectual struggle and to a craving for supernatural help." p. 24.
- d. "There is the need, under the sufferings of life, of sources of strength, such as the light of nature does not afford. Relief under afflictions, peace in sorrow, salvation from despondency, are wants which are deeply felt." p. 24.
 - Christianity meets all of these needs.

¹⁰ Orr, *Ibid.* p. 72.

¹¹ Fisher, *Ibid.* p. 22.

4. Christianity originates in and with Jesus; and Jesus is definitely associated with miracles.

Evidence that Jesus worked miracles:

a. Fisher:

- (1) "On different occasions Jesus is said to have told those whom he miraculously healed not to make it publicly known:

Matt. 9:30 -- and their eyes were opened. and Jesus sternly warned them, saying, "see that no one knows about this!"

Matt. 12:16 -- "... and warned them not to make him known;"

Matt. 17:9 -- and as they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "tell the vision to no one until the son of man has risen from the dead."

Mark 3:12 -- and he earnestly warned them not to reveal his identity.

Luke 5:14 -- and her parents were amazed; but he instructed them to tell no one what had happened.

- (2) "He wished to avoid a public excitement having little or no kinship with moral and spiritual feeling."

- (3) "Cautions, which are plainly authentic, against an excessive esteem of miracles, are said to have been uttered by Jesus:

John 4:48 -- Jesus therefore said to him, "unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe."

John 14:11 -- "believe me that I am in the father, and the father in me; otherwise, believe on account of the works themselves."

Matt. 16:3 -- and in the morning, "there will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening." Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?

Luke 10:17 -- and the seventy returned with joy, saying, "lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name."

No one who made up stories of miracles would connect with his accounts a disparagement of them, or anything that looked like it:

Luke 10:20 -- "nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

(3) "There are sayings of Christ ... which are inseparable from the miracles with which they are connected:

Matt. 11:4 -- and Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John the things which you hear and see; ..."

Luke 14:5 -- and he said to them, "Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?"

Luke 17:22 -- and he said to the disciples, "The days shall come when you will long to see one of the days of the son of man, and you will not see it. ..."

b. Macartney:

C. E. Macartney said,

"The miracles and the gospel stand or fall together ... Not only is the unity of Christ's personality broken if we reject the miracles, for history knows but one Christ, the Christ of the gospels, and that Christ worked miracles, but the integrity of Christ is destroyed."¹²

¹² C. E. Macartney, *ibid.*, pp. 77, 78.

c. Fisher:

"The evangelists ascribe to Jesus no miracles prior to his baptism. [Compare this with the] apocryphal gospels."

"Moreover no miracles are attributed to John The Baptist, notwithstanding that so much value is attached in the gospels to his testimony to Jesus. If there had been a disposition to make up stories of miracles that did not occur, why is not John credited with works of a like nature?"¹³

5. Purpose of miracles:

a. Miracles are aids to faith.

They come in with decisive effect **to convince** those who are impressed by the moral evidence that they are not deceived, and that God is in reality speaking through men. According to the New Testament histories it was in this light that Jesus regarded miracles. Where there was no spiritual preparation, no dawning faith, he refused to perform miracles."¹⁴

b. Macartney:

"The purpose of the miracles is stated in the sentence spoken by Jesus when he summoned Lazarus to come forth from the grave. **'That they may know that thou hast sent me.'**"¹⁵ **Attesting to identity and office.**

¹³ Fisher, *ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Fisher, *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Macartney, *ibid.*, p. 80.

See:

Matt. 9:9 -- and as Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me!" And he rose, and followed him.

John 11:42 -- "And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people standing around I said it, that they may believe that thou didst send me."

John 20:30, 31 -- Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name.

F. Bettex, *The Miracle*.

Lorraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, p. 176-179.

H. W. Everest, *The Divine Demonstration*, p. 22-28, 241-248.

Clarence Macartney, *Christian Faith and the Spirit of the Age*, p. 164-236.

James Orr, *The Faith of a Modern Christian*, p. 155-162.

C. Trench, *Notes on the Miracles*.

Miracles and their moral relationship

With the possibility and probability of miracles established, it now remains to be seen whether there is a relation between the physical miracles of Jesus and the moral nature of His kingdom. If this can be established, then the probability becomes greater.

The Gospel of John is not a biography of the life of Christ, but it contains a few selected events of a few of the days of His ministry. Of the more than one thousand days of His personal ministry, John selects events out of only twenty at the most. More than one-third (by verses) of the book is devoted to the last twenty-four hours of His life.

The Gospel of John presents the conflict between Jesus and Satan, in which the conflict mounts in intensity until it looks as if Satan has won. But not so! Christ is raised from the dead. Light and truth triumph. The victory is complete. Jesus is proved to be the Son of God.

Of the books of the New Testament the Gospel of John is probably the book that is the strongest evidence for the deity of Jesus. John's theme is the deity of Christ, combined with His humanity. John summarizes the purpose of his writing in John 20:30-31.

The theme of this section is the moral quality of the signs as evidence to the deity of Christ. Each sign has a moral significance. Each sign tends to relate Jesus to the moral and physical universe.

He is Lord of all.

The "I AM's" of Jesus.

1. Jesus claimed eternal existence.

John 8:58. Cf. Exodus 3:13,14. "Before Abraham was born "I AM."

2. Jesus told the woman at the well that He is the Christ.

John 4:26 -- Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

3. His signs confirm Him as Messiah and the Eternal I AM.

a. Bread of Life. John 6:35.

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. ..."

b. Light of the World. 8:12.

c. Door to pasture and protection. John 10:7-9.

d. The Good Shepherd. John 10:11, 14.

- e. Way, Truth, Life. John 14:6.
- f. The Vine. John 15:1-8.
- g. The Resurrection and Life. John 11:25.

The signs that confirm His claims, and their moral qualities.

1. Water to wine, John 2:1-11.

- a. A social Being.
- b. The “All-provident One” who provides only the best.

2. Healing of the nobleman’s son, John 4:46-54.

- a. Demonstrates power over distance.
- b. Demonstrates power over disease.
- c. With Christ distance is no obstacle.
- d. “I AM the life.”

3. Lame man at Bethesda. John 5:1-18.

- a. Master of time—38 years is not obstacle.
- b. Power over illness.
- c. He came from God.
- d. Can do only as He sees the Father doing, John 5:19.

4. Feeding the five thousand. Loaves and fishes. John 6.

- a. The Bread of Life.
- b. The Good Shepherd.

5. Walking on water. John 6:16-21.

- a. The Door to safety.
- b. The Way.
- c. The Master of Nature.

6. Sight to the blind. John 11.

- a. The Light.
- b. The Provider of Light.
- c. Figuratively, The Teacher.

7. The Raising of Lazarus. John 11.

The Resurrection and the Life.

CONCLUSION: As one sees Jesus in the midst of a moral world, and as one sees His works—all of which have a moral significance, He becomes the miracle of the age. As one beholds Him, His claims, His works, His power over the heart, one asks for no greater miracle than Jesus.

With the possibility and probability of miracles established and with the work and life of Jesus inseparably connected with them—if the resurrection can be proved, which is the supreme miracle, all other miracles are verified. If the resurrection cannot be proved then the other miracles do not matter.

Merrill Tenney, *John, The Gospel of Belief*.

Miracles of our Lord

1. Narrated in one Gospel only.

Matthew

Two blind men healed	9.27
A dumb demoniac healed	9.32
Stater In the mouth of the fish	17.24

Mark

The deaf and mute man healed	7.31
A blind man healed	8.22

Luke

Christ passes unseen through the multitude	4.30
Draught of fishes	5.1
Raising the widow's son	7.11
Healing the crooked woman	13.11
Healing the man with the dropsy	14.1
Healing the ten lepers	17.11
Healing the ear of Malchus, servant of the high priest	22.50

John

Turning water into wine	2.1
Healing the nobleman's son (of fever)	4.46
Healing the Impotent man at Bethesda	5.1
Healing the man born blind	9.1
Raising of Lazarus	11.43

Draught of fishes 21.1

2. Narrated in two gospels.

Mark, Luke.

Demoniac in synagogue cured 1.23 4.33

Matthew, Luke

Healing centurion's servant 8.5 7.1

The blind and mute demoniac 12.22 11.14

2a. Narrated in two gospels.

Matthew, Mark

Daughter of the Syrophenician 15.21 7.24

Feeding the four thousand 15.32 8.1

Cursing the fig tree 21.18 11.12

3. Narrated in three gospels. Mat. Mark. Luke.

Healing the leper 8.2 1.40 5.12

Peter's mother-in-law 8.14 1.30 4.38

Stilling the storm 8.26 4.37 8.22

Devils entering swine 8.28 5.1 8.27

Man sick of the palsy 9.2 2.3 5.18

Issue of blood 9.20 5.25 8.43

Jairus' daughter 9.23 5.38 8.49

Withered hand 12.10 3.1 6.6

Curing demoniac child 17.14 9.17 9.38

Blind Bartimaeus 20.30 10.46 18.35

3a. Narrated in three gospels.

Matthew, Mark, John

Walking on the sea 14.25 6.48 6.19

4. Narrated in four gospels.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

Feeding the five thousand 14.19 6.35 9.12 6.5

The conclusive nature of concurrent testimony.

George Campbell, D. D., principal of the Marshall College, Aberdeen, Scotland, in correspondence between himself and David Hume, wrote a reply to Hume's philosophically worded argument that it was inherently impossible to produce proof sufficient to offset what he declared to be the conclusive presumption against a miracle. Campbell replied,

“In a number of concurrent testimonies, where there has been no previous concert there is a probability distinct from that which may be termed the sum of the probabilities resulting from the testimony of the witnesses; a probability which would remain even though the witnesses were of such character as to merit no faith at all. This probability arises from the concurrence itself. That such a concurrence should spring from chance is as one to infinity; that is, in other words, morally impossible. If, therefore, concert be excluded, there remains no cause but the reality of the fact.”¹⁶

- Consider this as it applies to the testimony about the miracles of Jesus.
- Many of the miracles of Jesus are reported by at least two writers, some by three.
- The Jewish authorities did not deny that Jesus worked miracles. They attributed his work to Beelzebub; i.e., Satan. See Matthew 9:34; 12:24.
 - Thus, the fact of the miracles was established.
 - Jesus said he worked miracles by the power of God.
- The authorities believed that Jesus was performing signs. After Jesus raised Lazarus of Bethany from the dead they admitted as much.

John 11:47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 “If we let Him go

¹⁶ Linton, I. H., *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, p. 55.

on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” NASB.

- Celsus admits that Jesus worked miracles but he adopted an argument similar to that of the Pharisees as recorded in the gospels. Wilken says concerning the miracles of Jesus that, Celsus is, however, explicit. “It was by sorcery that he [Jesus] was able to accomplish the wonders which he performed .” (c. Cels. 1.6). Further, he says, “It is by the names of certain demons, and by the use of incantations, that the Christians appear to be possessed of (miraculous) power.” (c. Cels. 1.6).¹⁷
 - Celsus testifies to the fact of the miracles.
 - Celsus’ testimony falsely attributes Jesus’ miracles to sorcery, as did the enemies of Jesus in Jerusalem.
- God performed the grandest of all miracles when he raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.
- A single miracle is all it takes to completely invalidate the philosophy of materialism. And if materialism is invalidated then evolution, humanism and atheism are all invalidated because they depend on materialism.

¹⁷ Compiled by Niall McCloskey from volume 4 of *The ante-Nicene fathers : translations of the writings of the fathers down to A.D. 325*, the Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., and James Donaldson, LL.D., editors; American reprint of the Edinburgh edition, revised and chronologically arranged, with brief prefaces and occasional notes, by A. Cleveland Coxe, D.D. Buffalo, Christian Literature Pub. Co., 1886-87.