

Miracles

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in the Bible

Can the miracles in the Bible
be explained by the laws of nature?



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Miracles in the Bible

At first glance miracles seem unrealistic in our time because we are strongly influenced by science. The second half of the last century in particular has seen amazing revelations and progress in scientific and technical fields:

- In 1938 the world's first programmed computer was presented to the world by German inventor Konrad Zuse (1910–1995).
- On December 3rd, 1967 South African Doctor of Medicine Christiaan Barnard (1922–2001) successfully transplanted a human heart.
- On July 21st, 1969 man first set foot on the moon. Astronaut Neil Armstrong proudly proclaimed his famous statement: "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."
- In 1996 Scottish embryologist Ian Wilmut cloned Dolly the sheep.

These few examples could give us the impression that man's abilities have no limits; that science can help us accomplish anything. And it's because of this unshakable faith in science that so many of our contemporaries have great problems with the Bible. They argue that the "Book of Books" describes too many incidences that cannot be explained scientifically. Some of these are:

- the virgin birth
- the raising of the dead
- the blind seeing and the lame walking
- the sun standing still.

In this tract, we are confronted with the phenomenon of miracles in the Bible and ask ourselves, "Can 21st-century man can be reasonably expected to believe them?". Perhaps we should start by giving a preliminary definition for miracles. Let us call it **D1**:

D1: Miracles are events that happen unexpectedly and unexplainably, contradicting our everyday observations and causing us to marvel.

If miracles are unexpected, what then is the expected?

This question will help us draw a clear line between miracles (the seemingly unexplainable) and non-miracles (the explainable). Everything in our world happens within a framework set by the laws of nature. These laws cannot be changed. As far as we know, they have been constant, i.e. stayed the same since they were put into operation at Creation. These laws of nature – or natural laws – offer a broad scope for a great variety of technical inventions, while at the same time excluding many processes as being unrealistic, despite our dreams and imaginations.

Amazing laws of nature

The laws of nature themselves are things that should be marvelled at. They are able to achieve phenomenal things. Some time ago I went to see the port of Hamburg, the biggest seaport in Germany, and I was able to watch a big ship making slow movements in the water. This reminded me of a law of nature, which was discovered by Archimedes (285–212 BC): *“Any body wholly or partially immersed in fluid experiences an upthrust equal to, but opposite in sense to, the weight of the fluid displaced.”*

Are we actually aware of how phenomenal this is? If for example a rat should run on board, the ship would react instantly by sinking



deeper into the water in direct proportion to the weight of the rat. If we wanted to calculate the new immersion depth, this would not be possible for us; we do not know the exact shape of the ship, in some places the paint may have peeled off or perhaps part of the ship's propeller is not under water. All these aspects have to be taken into account in order to make a correct calculation. Yet in reality, this happens instantly and with total precision. Who commands the water molecules to make room for the ship to sink deeper into the water, exactly in proportion to the weight of the rat?

This law of nature is not only binding for this one ship in the port of Hamburg, but for all ships the world over. It is binding for the toy duck in the bath tub as well as the real duck swimming on a lake or river. Nobody would be able to calculate the exact immersion depth of the duck, because of the incalculable form and structure of its feathers. Who is responsible for the right conditions for this so simply formulated law of nature under such complicated circumstances? There has to be somebody who makes the calculations and makes sure their results meet the conditions of the laws of nature every time.

Who is responsible for keeping the laws of nature?

Indeed, there is someone who is responsible for keeping the laws of nature. We read about Him in the Bible (Colossians 1:17): *"... and in Him all things exist."* This keeper of the world is also the One by whom all things are made. *"For by Him all things are created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible ... All things were created through Him and for Him"* (Colossians 1:16). The One who is the Creator of all things is also the One who maintains them; He is the Lord Jesus Christ! We could also say: Jesus Christ is Lord over all, from the micro- to the macrocosmos.

Creation in itself was not an incident that occurred with the help of the laws of nature. Here the Creator formed everything by the power of His Word, by His authority and His wisdom. There was no need for any laws of nature; so these were not the cause but the effect of creation. After (or during) its completion the laws of nature were activated in order to maintain what had been created in working order. Jesus is the One who guarantees that these are met every time and everywhere. He does not need a computer or any other tool to achieve this. His all-powerful word is sufficient. We read in the letter to the Hebrews (1:3): “... **and upholding all things by the word of His power**”. So, then, we see that the laws of science and Jesus’ maintaining and upholding power are effectively one and the same thing; this maintaining power of Jesus manifests itself in the laws of nature. In their entirety these natural laws form a secure framework for every process in this world.

How then can there still be room for miracles?

In practical terms the laws of nature function like a “Supreme Court”, which decides whether a procedure is within the known boundaries of our world or not. Most of the complex processes in the created world we live in (e.g. the functioning of the brain and the development of the embryo) are unparalleled by man and, therefore, “miraculous”. Yet these miracles do not violate any law of nature. Because we expect them to happen, however complex or incomprehensible they may be, we do not consider them to be miracles. This thought leads us to a more precise definition than D1 for miracles. Let us call it **D2**:

D2: *Miracles are events in time and space that happen outside the framework of the laws of nature.*

Man is not able to override the laws of nature. Therefore, he cannot do miracles. The Bible, on the other hand, tells us of numerous situations in which either God the Father or His Son Jesus Christ have performed miracles. Here are some examples:

- the crossing of the Red Sea by the people of Israel (Ex. 14:16–22)
- Joshua's long day (Josh. 10:12–14)
- the calming of the storm (Mk. 4:35–41)
- Jesus walking on water (John 6:16–21)
- healing of the man born blind (John 9:1–7)
- feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1–5)
- the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11:32–45).

Note: If occasionally people are able to perform miracles that lie outside the boundaries of the laws of nature, they act in the name of other powers, not their own. They are either:

- disciples of Jesus who act in His authority [as Peter for example walked on water at Jesus' bidding (Matthew 14:29) or healed the lame man at the temple door in the name of Jesus (Acts 3:1–9)], or they are
- wizards and gurus who are manipulated by demonic forces [for example the magicians of Pharaoh in Egypt (Exodus 7:11–12)].

Can the miracles of the Bible be explained with the laws of nature?

God is able to act within the laws of nature, but most of the time He does so outside them. James tells us in his letter (James 5:17–18) that Elijah's prayer stopped the rain for 3 1/2 years and that another of his prayers caused the rain to come back. It was God who had acted according to Elijah's prayer. Nevertheless, a meteorologist would understandably not concede that a law of nature was violated in this case.

In the Age of Enlightenment that we live in, everybody scrutinizes the biblical texts to see whether the reported miracles can be explained scientifically. If not, they are discarded as impossible and therefore untrue.

Most of the events in the Bible cannot, and should not, be understood within the framework of the laws of nature. God's actions are far superior. These laws are His creation, and He therefore is not subject to them. When He acts, there is nothing in the universe that can limit Him. His will be done, *"For with God nothing is impossible"* (Luke 1:37).

Creation itself, as described in the first chapter of Genesis, was the first miracle the Bible tells us about. Within six days God created a wonderful universe and all living creatures on Earth according to His own will and plan.

The incarnation of the Son of God is an exceptional miracle and a divine mystery: the virgin Mary conceives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is born and is the Son of God and the son of man in one person. Through His death on the cross He pays for our sins and becomes our door to eternal life.

The resurrection of Jesus is another very distinctive incident that defies all scientific explanations. Every attempt to explain this medically or biologically misses the point. The resurrection was, and will always be, a supernatural act of God outside the laws of nature.

Why did Jesus do miracles?

The miracles which Jesus did are inseparably connected with His teaching. He did not come from Heaven holding a passport that identified Him as "Son of God". Instead He proved Himself to be the messenger of God by the authority of His words and deeds. His authority as Creator, Saviour and

eternal King was emphasized by the signs and wonders He did. They are an integral part of His mission and His teaching.

With all of the aforementioned in mind, we can now define divine miracles even more precisely as:

D3: Miracles are amazing and exceptional acts and events invariably initiated by God or His Son Jesus Christ. These acts usually take place outside all laws of nature.

Contrary to events based on demonic powers, the miracles of God serve the following:

- **to glorify God**
[e.g. Creation (Psalm 19:2), the healing of the man born blind (John 9:3)]
- **to help people on Earth**
[e.g. a rock in the wilderness brings forth water (Exodus 17:1–6), ravens feed Elijah (1 Kings 17:6)]
- **to strengthen faith**
[e.g. turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:11)]
- **to rescue in times of adversity**
[e.g. the calming of the storm (Mark 4:39)].



The miracle of faith

One of the greatest miracles in our times is when a person responds to the call of Jesus and thus receives eternal life. This miracle does not have to override any law of nature. It just requires one to abandon old ways of thinking and replace them with new ones. A good example is the story of the prison keeper in Acts 16:23–34, who

changed from being a man distant from God to a true believer. On asking Paul and Silas: ***“What must I do to be saved?”*** they answered him: ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”***

Why did Paul not say: “Believe in God.”? The prison keeper would probably have answered him: “We have enough gods in Greece — Zeus, Cronos and Rhea, Poseidon, Hades, Apollos, Artemis and Hermes.” But Paul referred to Jesus, the One who was crucified and rose again from the dead. Only in Him do we find salvation and eternal life. There was only one answer to the question of the prison keeper back then, as it is today: “Jesus!”

This man understood and turned to Jesus as his personal Saviour.



The short span of time the prison keeper needed to make his decision is remarkable. At midnight he heard about the way of salvation for the very first time. Paul and Silas may have explained things to him in more detail, but even if they took several hours talking to him, it all happened within a single day. This should be encouraging for a

reader who hears about the Gospel for the very first time today. You do not need to hear 23 or 168 sermons to accept Jesus for who He is. The power of the Gospel is there — instantly. No law of nature is violated when “the miracle of faith” happens. There are, however, almost always walls in our own will that have to be torn down:

- the wall of our deadlocked thinking
- walls of pride and self-righteousness
- walls of a hardened heart.

The effect it has on someone when he comes to believing in Jesus surpasses everything humanly

imaginable. He changes from the path of doom to a path of salvation, and becomes a citizen of heaven in one moment: "For our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20). It shows us that to enter into a personal walk of faith with Jesus Christ is the greatest miracle that can happen to us. Why don't you decide today to start a new life in a personal relationship with Him? With a prayer such as the one following you can proclaim your life-saving faith and secure a place in heaven:

"Lord Jesus Christ, please take away my pride and all other sins in my life. I believe that you are God, became flesh and came down to Earth for us. I believe that you died for me and then rose again from the dead. You are my Saviour. I trust in You and ask You to come into my life. I ask you to enter my heart, become the Lord of my life and guide me safely to heaven, my new destination. Amen!"

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