

Biblical Miracles: Fact or Fiction?

In November 1930, *The New York Times Magazine* published an essay by Albert Einstein titled *Religion and Science*, in which he wrote: "The man who is thoroughly convinced of the universal operation of the law of causation cannot for a moment entertain **the idea of a being who interferes in the course of events...**" (my emphasis). Clearly, he is referring to miracles, and this view aligns with his consistent rejection of a personal God who hears prayers and intervenes in human affairs.

But how do we make sense of the fact that influential figures in the world of biblical criticism are equally emphatic in their rejection of all things miraculous? For example, Rudolf K. Bultmann, the renowned German theologian, wrote in his *Jesus Christ and Mythology*: ..."

"(M)odern man acknowledges as reality only such phenomena or events as are comprehensible within the framework of the rational order of the universe. **He does not acknowledge miracles because they do not fit into this lawful order**" (emphasis mine).

According to Britannica, "With the resumption of contacts between the German universities and the rest of the world after World War II, Bultmann became a major international academic figure." It is not surprising, then, that some today who claim to follow Jesus deny his resurrection, are sceptical of the virgin birth, and offer naturalistic explanations for his miracles. When an intelligent, articulate, and media-savvy religious leader like the late Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus using pious-sounding, pseudo-spiritual language, his words carried far and weighed heavily with many in Christendom. And in our view, this is tragic.

As is often the case, C. S. Lewis explains in plain language just what's at issue here. In *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, he writes:

"All the essentials of Hinduism would, I think, remain unimpaired if you subtracted the miraculous, and the same is almost true of Mohammedism. But you cannot do that with Christianity. It is precisely the story of a great Miracle. A naturalistic Christianity leaves out all that is specifically Christian."

Again:

"The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation. They say that God became man. Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this...

The fitness, and therefore credibility, of the particular miracles depends on their relation to the Grand Miracle; all discussion of them in isolation from it is futile."

As restorationists, we are firmly committed to belief in what Lewis calls “the Grand Miracle,” and in all that it implies. We are convinced that a naturalistic “Christianity” is simply not an option. In our view, if you deny the virgin birth, the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and the testimony of the signs He performed, you are left with nothing more than a pathetic, self-deceived Galilean peasant and a tatty old book with nothing of value to say to us today.

The apostle Peter wrote: “For we did not follow cleverly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”

Peter was there at the empty tomb. Bultmann and Spong were not.

In an oft-quoted article on miracles, Gordon H. Clark wrote:

“If God lives, miracles are not only possible, they are appropriate; and whether or not one has occurred is not a question for secular science but a matter of testimony by divinely appointed witnesses.” (The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible)

One such “divinely appointed” witness, the apostle John, provides a carefully curated account of seven miracles (plus the resurrection), which he terms “signs” (semeion) in his Gospel. Each miracle is framed as a sign pointing to a spiritual truth, and near the end of his account, the beloved disciple explains:

“Therefore, many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31).

John believed that his record of Jesus’ miracles was capable of inspiring belief in the hearts of those who were not present to witness them. We accept John’s testimony. It is our conviction that miracles are possible, that the witnesses to biblical miracles are credible, and that faith in Christ is grounded on a firm foundation. We also hold the conviction that miracles have ceased, and once again, our position is based on Scripture (see Part 2).

Rex

Christians meeting at 360 Peachgrove Road Hamilton

Please accept our invitation to attend worship services with us at the times and location advertised. Under What to Expect we explain format and give Scriptural explanations for our practices