

Miracles: Providing Validation for the Christian Faith— Part Four

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Logical Confirmation of Miracles. The logic behind a miracle being used to confirm a religious truth claim goes like this:

1. If a theistic God exists, then miracles are possible.
2. A miracle is a special act of God.
3. God is the source and standard of all truth; he cannot err.
4. Nor would a theistic God act to confirm something as true that was false.
5. Therefore, true miracles in connection with a message confirm that message to be from God: (a) The miracle confirms the message. (b) The sign confirms the sermon. (c) An act of God confirms the Word of God. (d) New revelation needs new confirmation.

If there is an all-powerful, all-good, and all-wise God, then it follows that he would not perform a miraculous act to confirm a lie. Since miracles are by nature special acts of God, God would not act contrary to his own nature. The God of all truth would not miraculously confirm error. Hence, when a truth claim is repeatedly confirmed by miracles, such as the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the New Testament apostles did, then it is true and all opposing views are false.

Criteria for Confirmation. Several criteria can be established, on the basis of principles discussed above, for allowing miracles as a confirmation of a truth claim. These are criteria for apologetically valuable miracles. They all assume miracles to be possible. Confirming miracles should be:

- Connected with a Truth Claim
- Truly Supernatural
- Unique
- Multiple
- Predictive

Connected with a Truth Claim. Not all supernatural events are connected with truth claims. There was no truth claim announced of which the acts of creation are evidence. Neither was there a lesson taught by the translation of Enoch to heaven (Genesis 5), the plagues on the king who took Abraham's wife (Genesis 12), the manna from heaven (Exodus 16), Samson's supernatural feats (Judges 14-16), or the resurrection of the man who touched Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13). Most miracles are connected with a person who is thereby shown to be a prophet of God. But these acts lack direct apologetic value without the specific claim of prophethood and a message from God.

Truly Supernatural. A miracle is truly supernatural, as opposed to an anomaly, magic, a psychosomatic cure, or even a special act of providence. None of these involve true supernatural intervention. All can be explained by natural means, even if they are at times very unusual and though they are used by God. One characteristic of a supernatural event is

that it is immediate, rather than gradual. It is an irregular and naturally unrepeatable event. It is successful every time it is attempted by God or a person he empowers.

Unique. Hume argued that an alleged supernatural event cannot support one religious claim as long as a contradictory claim is made by another who can perform the same kind of alleged miracles. Similar competing miracles are self-canceling. Logically, from a theistic standpoint, it is impossible for true miracles to confirm contradictory claims, since a true miracle is an act of God, who cannot confirm what amounts to a lie (Heb. 6:18; cf. Titus 1:2).

Multiple. As Deuteronomy 17:6 put it, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established.” Multiple witnesses are better than one. In fact, in crucial life-and-death legal matters multiple testimony is often mandatory. One miracle leaves room for doubt. Hence, apologetically relevant miracles should be multiple.

Predictive. Another characteristic often connected with a confirming miracle is that it is often predicted. While this is not essential, it is helpful. It eliminates charges that the miraculous event is not connected with the truth claim. Otherwise, it might be viewed as a fluke. For example, if a false teacher was teaching along the shores of the Sea of Galilee as Jesus walked by on the water, Jesus’ walking should not have been taken as a confirmation of the false teacher’s views.

On many occasions in the Bible, Jesus and other prophets predicted and performed miracles that confirmed their claims. Jesus predicted his resurrection from early in his ministry on (Matt. 12:40; 17:22-23; 20:18-19; John 2:19-22). He explicitly predicted the resurrection as a “sign” (miracle) of his claims (Matt. 12:39-40). Once Jesus emphatically said ahead of time that a miracle would be evidence of his claim to be the Messiah: “‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’ he said to the paralytic, ‘I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home’” (Mark 2:10-11).

In the Old Testament miracles were often announced in advance. Elijah predicted the fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice (1 Kings 18:22f.). Moses promised supernatural judgments of God on Egypt (Exod. 4:21-23). Moses announced that the rod would bud (Num. 17:5) and that the rebellious Korah would be judged (Num. 16:28-30).

Conclusion. Even Flew would not claim that his argument eliminates the possibility of miracles. He does believe it seriously cripples Christian apologetics. If miracles cannot be identified as supernatural events, they have no real apologetic value. A merely unusual event within nature can prove nothing beyond nature. However, Christian apologists can evade this problem by either presupposing the existence of God or by offering evidence independent of miracles for his existence. For as long as there is a God who can act, then special acts of God (miracles) are possible and identifiable. The only way to disprove this possibility is to disprove the possibility of God’s existence. But such attempts are notoriously unsuccessful and self-refuting.

Not only can miracles confirm a truth claim, but biblical miracles fit all the criteria for such apologetically valuable miracles. No other religion or claimants to truth contradictory to Christianity have offered verified examples of truly supernatural events. We can conclude that biblical miracles, and they alone, support the truth claims of Christ and the biblical prophets. Christianity alone is a supernaturally confirmed religion.

Sources

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