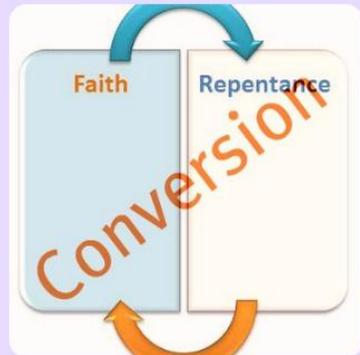
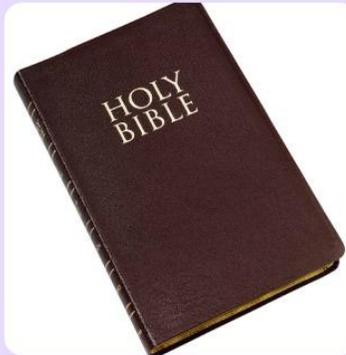


# Do You Believe in Miracles?



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# Part One:

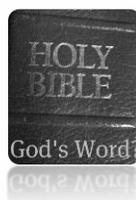
Against the backdrop of growing skepticism in Britain and the west, C. S. Lewis wrote an important little treatise in defense of miracles. As the progress of science became more and more intertwined with Darwin's evolutionary schemes of human origin, philosophers and academics became less and less comfortable speaking about miracles. Yet, Lewis stepped in and placed before the world a stunningly clear explanation and defense of miracles. Lewis wrote, "Miracles are a retelling in small letters of the very same story which is written across the whole world in letters too large for some of us to see."



The point Lewis made, of course, is the same one made by the psalmist nearly two thousand years before him: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-2, ESV). What the stars sing in the background, the miracles croon specifically. God speaks plainly through creation, but not all people listen to what is being said. So, God speaks even more plainly through miracles. But what do the miracles say?

The miracles say that God is at work among humankind. In John 3, Nicodemus affirms what was commonly believed among the religious leaders of Jesus's day. The miracles of Jesus were a clear sign that he had come from God, for no one could do such miraculous signs, "unless God is with him" (John 3:2). When Peter preached his great sermon at Pentecost, he, too, affirmed what Nicodemus knew—that Jesus was a man who was attested to by God with mighty works and wonders and signs (Acts 2:22). Nicodemus, like both the Apostle Peter and C. S. Lewis who came after him, was convinced that miracles indicated the near presence of the living God. The miracles of Jesus make plain that Jesus Christ himself came from God.

Jesus taught his disciples that miracles were designed to confirm his identity as the Son of God. After John the Baptist had been thrown into prison by Herod, he sent his own followers to Jesus in order to confirm that Jesus was in fact the Messiah sent to earth from Heaven. One can understand John's concern. He was, literally, about to lose his head for the cause of Christ. He needed to be sure that Jesus was, indeed, sent from God.



To confirm his own identity (and to put John the Baptist at ease), Jesus reported to John's followers that they had already seen enough of his miracles to conclude that he was from God. Luke reports that at the very same time the followers of John came to inquire of him, Jesus was healing diseases, casting out evil spirits, and giving sight to the blind (Luke 11:21). Jesus told the followers of John to go back and report to their master all the miracles they had witnessed. In short, Jesus appealed to his miracles as support for the presence of God in his ministry.

Jesus made clear that his miracles demonstrated the presence of God at work. Yet, some viewed the signs and wonders of Jesus as evidence that he was a false prophet. Though no one doubted whether or not Jesus was performing miracles, some—like the Pharisees—were certain that the miracles condemned his ministry rather than affirmed it in the eyes of God. This condemnation sounds strange at first, but when one understands the Old Testament instruction on miracles, he can see what it was that caused the Pharisees to stumble in the matter of the signs and wonders of Jesus.

## Part Two:

From the earliest stages of the Old Testament, instructions were given for people by God concerning miracles and their proper functions. In Deuteronomy 13:1-3, God's people received a succinct, yet irrefutably clear, annunciation of the function of miracles. There are two primary functions of the signs and wonders.

First, the signs and wonders acknowledge the presence of God. Yet, the mere presence of the signs and wonders is not enough to affirm the presence of God at work. It is possible that signs and wonders might be performed by false prophets (as was the case with Pharaoh's magicians in Egypt). Thus, a second function of the miracles was to affirm all that God taught and commanded. Deuteronomy 13:1-3 orders Israel to test the prophet to see whether his signs and wonders are followed by leading the people astray from the one, true God. If so, then the false prophet is to be executed for misleading the people by deceitfully performing signs and wonders only to lead God's people to worship false gods.

Ironically, this Deuteronomy 13 passage is that which was used by the Pharisees against Jesus. Their legalistic interpretations of the Old Testament were too restrictive to realize that Christ was leading to the Father (John 14:6) and not away from him. To the Pharisees, Jesus was performing signs and wonders, but he was also leading folks away from God. Again, no one doubted whether Jesus was performing miracles. No one doubted whether his miracles were supernatural either, but there was doubt among the unbelieving—and especially among the religious leaders—as to whether his miracles came from God.

This matter of Jesus's signs and wonders brought the inevitable clash between Jesus and his accusers to its ultimate head. The Pharisees, in accordance with Deuteronomy 13, demanded that Jesus perform a sign in order to test him (Luke 11:16).



Ostensibly, they were testing him in accord with the faithful practices outlined in Deuteronomy 13. Yet, instead of affirming God's presence from the works of Jesus, these leaders instead insisted that his signs and wonders were empowered by the devil (Luke 11:14ff). Against their accusations, Jesus confirmed that his miracles represented nothing less than the dawning of the kingdom of God (Luke 11:20).

Undaunted, the Pharisees and others persisted in their unbelief—even ascribing Jesus's miracles to Satan. In this context, the unpardonable sin arises. It is a severe rebellion which will not answer the cry of the miracles of God. How much more severe a crime is it to ascribe those miraculous outbursts of God's good works to the evil one himself! From the perspective of Jesus, the miracles speak loudly and clearly to the presence of God at work in the midst of his creation.

Lewis is correct, then, that the miracles write out quite legibly a testimony from God that He is at work in the midst of humankind. Lewis had his skeptics to deal with, just as Jesus had his. Some, like the Pharisees, would deny the source of the miracles. Others—like the followers of the Scottish philosopher David Hume—would deny the very presence of miracles. Still others—like King Herod—sought to see the miracles just for the sheer entertainment value, as though Jesus were nothing more than a spiritual magician (Mark 8:15). For all these who fail to acknowledge the presence of the living God, the miracles stand as a testimony of their unbelief (see John 9:41).

## Part Three:

However, the much more positive perspective on the miracles of Jesus is that they often led to faith (as was their design). When the man born blind received his sight in John 9, he said, "I believe." And he worshiped at the feet of Jesus (John 9:38). When the lame beggar outside the temple was healed, he went out walking and leaping and praising God (Acts 9:8). Such is God's design for his miracles.

Undoubtedly, the skeptics and unbelievers will persist in denying the presence of miracles. Jesus had his skeptics, as did C. S. Lewis nearly two thousand years later. No one will ever prove the existence of miracles to everyone's satisfaction, but the believer will hold to their reality with the vehement certainty of a mother who knows her own child. Why?

The believer owes his very own spiritual existence to a miracle. The plainest evidence to the believer of the reality of miracles is his own spiritual awakening to Christ. Jesus tells

Nicodemus that this spiritual awakening is a new birth, wrought by God (John 3:3, 21). The Apostle Paul says that faith comes as a gift to the believer who is made alive by God's hand at work, not as a result of man's efforts—so that no one may boast before God (Ephesians 2:1-10). Every believer is a walking testimony to the reality of a miracle of grace.

A monthly publication called *The King's Business* (published by Biola from 1910 – 1970) once told the story of the atheist Joseph Parker. Upon his visit to a mining town in the north of England, Parker proudly lectured the crowds repeatedly on why it was foolish to believe in God and to believe in miracles. After satisfactorily completing his eloquent refutation of the Christian faith, Parker prepared to leave the crowd to ponder how well he had demolished belief in Christ.



A poor, dirty man in grimy, mining clothes stood up and offered his own simple reply to Parker's polished unbelief. Reportedly, the man said, "Sir, I'm only a working man, and I don't know what you mean by the word 'myth.' But can you explain me? Three years ago I had a miserable home; I neglected my wife and children; I cursed and swore; I drank up all my wages. Then someone came along and showed me the love of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. And now all is different. We have a happy home; I love my wife and children; I feel better in every way; and I have given up the drink. A

new power has taken possession of me since Christ came into my life. Sir, can you explain me?"

Every Christian believer stands as an apt refutation to the skeptic's denial of miracles.

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