

**Dr. Jack L. Arnold**

## **HOW CAN MIRACLES BE POSSIBLE?**

Question number four asks about miracles and opposes naturalism to supernaturalism. “How can miracles be possible? In this scientific age, how can any intelligent person who considers the orderliness of the universe believe in them?” If we don’t get to the root of this question, we may waste long hours discussing whether Christ could possibly have walked on the water, whether in fact He did feed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, whether the children of Israel actually went through the Red Sea, et cetera. We can only answer these questions if we dig down to their basic presupposition. The real issue is whether or not God exists. If God exists, then miracles are logical and pose no intellectual contradictions.

A Japanese friend once told me he just couldn’t quite believe that a man could become God. I saw his problem in a flash and said, “Dr. Fukuma, I’d have quite a time believing that, too. But I can very easily believe that God became man.” There’s all the difference in the world between these two concepts. By definition God is all powerful. He can and does intervene in the universe that He has created.

Ultimately we’re being asked, “How do I know God exists?” Various answers will suggest the existence of God. One is the argument from design. If my wrist watch, relatively uncomplicated as it is, doesn’t exist “by chance” it seems illogical and naive to think that the universe in its infinite intricacy could have developed just “by chance.”

A similar argument is based on the law of cause and effect. As human beings, if we have intellect, emotion, and will, we assume that there was a cause greater than these to bring us into being. However, these answers have counter arguments and some evidence seems to negate them. So we should regard them as hints rather than conclusive proof that God exists.

The greatest indication of the existence of God is His coming into human history. As J. B. Phillips put it, we are “the visited planet.” In answering any one of these questions, we must eventually come to the same solution: Jesus Christ Himself. I know God exists, not because of all the philosophical arguments pro and con, but because He came into human history in Jesus Christ and I have met Him personally in my own life. Our answer begins with Him.

Because Jesus Christ claims to be God, we should ask ourselves whether His credentials substantiate His claim. Anyone, after all, can make the claim. I can; you can. A man in Philadelphia claims to be God and calls himself “Father Divine.” But with what credentials does one substantiate his claim? I dare say I could disprove your claim in five minutes, and you could probably disprove mine in two. And it’s not hard to disprove the claim of our friend in Philadelphia, But when we consider Jesus Christ it’s not so simple. His credentials do substantiate His claim. The supreme credential, of course, is the fact that He rose from the dead.

In helping a non-Christian think through the intellectual basis of Christianity our best defense is a good offense. We don’t want to be answering questions all the time. We can pose a few questions for him, too. Since he doesn’t believe, he has some questions to answer.

One way to stimulate his thinking is to ask, “Which of the other three possibilities about Jesus Christ do you believe since you don’t believe He was the Truth?” There are only four possible conclusions about Jesus Christ and His claims. He was either a liar, a lunatic, a legend, or the Truth. The person who doesn’t believe He was the Truth must label Him as a liar, a lunatic, or a legend. The average non-Christian doesn’t realize this. So we’ve got to remind him that by saying he doesn’t believe, he’s left himself only three alternatives.

“Which conclusion do you believe, and what evidence can you present to support this conclusion? Was he a liar?” Even those who deny His deity will invariably hasten to assure us that Jesus was a great moral philosopher and teacher. To call this good teacher a liar would be a contradiction of terms. It certainly seems improbable that He would lie about the most crucial point in His teaching, His deity.

Perhaps he was a lunatic. This conclusion would not destroy His moral integrity: He thought He was doing right, but He suffered from delusions of grandeur. We have people like this today who imagine they are Napoleon, or even Jesus Christ. The hitch in this conclusion is that the clinical symptoms of paranoia as we know it today don’t jibe with the personality characteristics of Jesus Christ. In His life we find no trace of the imbalance that characterizes such people. Consider the time of His death, for instance, when He was under tremendous pressure. The poise and composure we see in Him are not characteristic of people who suffer from paranoid disturbances. The biblical record gives no evidence that He was suffering from paranoia or any other mental disorder.

A third alternative is that our records about Jesus Christ are legendary. He never made some of the statements attributed to Him. They were put into His mouth by over-enthusiastic followers in the third or fourth century. He’d turn over in His grave if He knew the claims that have been written about Him. Modern archeology, however, makes it increasingly difficult to maintain this theory. For instance, recent findings confirm the belief that the New Testament documents were written during the lifetime of contemporaries of Jesus Christ. The development of an elaborate legend would have required a more significant time lag. People in that skeptical age would have been no more likely to circulate and accept a legend such as this than our neighbors today would be likely to spread a report that the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt claimed to be God, said he had the power to forgive sins, and rose from the dead. Too many people who knew President Roosevelt are still around. With so many testimonies to the contrary, the rumor could never get off the ground.

In discussing the existence of God, we also need to consider with the person what it means to prove or not prove God. Without realizing it, he probably expects proof according to the scientific method. We can never prove God by the scientific method. But this doesn’t mean that our case is lost. The scientific method as a means of verification is limited to measurable aspects of reality. The scientific method, therefore, is incapable of verifying many aspects of life.

No one has ever seen three feet of love or two pounds of justice, but we do not deny their reality. To insist that everything must be subjected to the scientific method for verification would be as ludicrous as to insist on measuring chlorine gas with a microphone. That’s not the purpose of the microphone; we can’t make it do what it has no capacity to do and deny the reality of gas in the process!

Another limitation of the scientific method is the need to verify a fact through repetition; such repetition is part of the scientific method. Now history happens to be non-repeatable. Since no one is ever going to repeat Napoleon—we can emphatically say that we can't prove Napoleon by the scientific method, that is. But what does that prove? Nothing much. Because we can't repeat history, it's outside the scope of the scientific method of verification. However, there is a science of history. As we examine the data for Christianity, and particularly the evidence for the resurrection, we find a solid case on which to base our conviction.

These are the ideas we need to suggest to a person who takes the essentially materialistic position based on rationalistic presuppositions and claims that because there is no supernatural, miracles are impossible. When someone begins with this presupposition, no amount of evidence will convince him of the truth.

If you started out by denying that miracles are possible, what evidence would convince you that a miracle had taken place? None. People who say, "If God would appear to me now I'd believe in Him," are very naive. Regardless of what happened, they'd explain it away in non-miraculous, naturalistic terms. Christ dealt with this problem in Luke 16:28-31, where the rich man in hell asked Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers. Abraham reminded him, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." But the rich man said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." Abraham told him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

The principle still holds today. The data we have concerning God's visitation to this planet are sufficient grounds for us to believe. When someone refuses to accept this evidence, no additional evidence will convince him.