

Putting First Things First (Building our Faith) Can a Thinking Person Believe the Miracles of the Bible?

Intro: Today there are millions of people who have dismissed faith as nothing more than a blind leap in the dark. They argue that that leap is no greater than when we affirm as true the miracle stories of the Bible which they say defy modern scientific knowledge. Simply put, the miracles of the Bible could not exist because they contradict the views of modern science.

Renounced atheist Richard Dawkins describes faith in miracles this way: “The virgin birth, the resurrection, the raising of Lazarus, even the OT miracles, all are freely used for religious propaganda, and they are very effective with an audience of unsophisticates and children.” (Strobel, p. 57). So there...you unsophisticated people!

Seriously, is Dawkins right? Do believers lack sophistication?

Today in our building faith series, we’re asking a very basic question, “Can a thinking person believe the miracles of the Bible?”

Some people are rather surprised to learn that believing in miracles was sometimes a challenge to even some of the greatest people of faith in Scripture.

Consider for example the reaction of Abraham and Sarah when God made to Abraham at the age of 99 that Sarah his 90 year-old- wife would have a child.

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” (Gen. 17:17)

Likewise Sarah also expressed a similar incredulous laugh:

And he said, “I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” (Gen. 18:10-12)

18:10-12)

In the NT consider Mary’s response to the promise of Gabriel that she would have a child:

And Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” (Lk. 1:34)

When we read texts like these, it becomes obvious that thinking people in the ancient world were as challenged by the prospects of events that were outside the natural course of things as we are. So we might ask, “On what basis did they believe?”

God’s response to the incredulous

In both accounts we can see how God sought to help their faith. His response to Abraham was to urge him to consider His almighty power.

And the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." (Genesis 18:13-14)

Likewise God's angel offered similar evidence to support Mary's faith. For nothing will be impossible with God." (Lk. 1:37)

Since these Bible characters had assurance of God's existence through His communications, they only had to consider the nature of His power to be convinced that God could and would work the miracles He had promised to perform in their lives.

But God's approach may also serve as a help to those today who have difficulty believing the miracles of the Bible.

Our response to the incredulous today

Here is what I'd say to the person who questions whether the miracles of the Bible were real:

If God exists and if He can intervene in the course of nature, then nothing is impossible with Him. If He could create a world out of nothing, then what is there He could not do? What miracle of the Bible becomes incredible?

The issue then of whether the miracles of the Bible were real or not is really reduced to the question, "Does God exist?" Because if God exists, then miracles are not only possible; they are probable as an indication of His existence.

But then we must ask:

On what basis then can the modern person believe in God?

(Three of five reasons suggested by William Lane Craig in "The Case for Faith.")

#1--It offers the best explanation of the origin of the universe.

Virtually all atheists now affirm that the universe began in a Big Bang. Let's grant their argument and go from there. "Since something cannot come from nothing, then there must be a transcendent cause beyond space and time which brought the universe into being." (p. 75).

Imagine you and a guest are sitting in the living room and suddenly from another part of the house you hear a loud pop. Alarmed by the sound your guest asks, "What was that?" And you respond, "Nothing caused it; loud pops like that just happen around our house." Would he believe you? Of course not! Nor would any atheist accept such an explanation. He would insist there must be some cause for the loud sound. Yet the atheist must affirm that the universe came into existence from nothing and by nothing. He insists upon an explanation for a small bang, but is perfectly willing to accept no cause for his Big Bang. Is it reasonable?

The theist affirms that the universe came into being from nothing by the power of God who is the uncaused cause of everything else. By nature He must exist outside the realm of materiality, space, and time. And that is exactly how the Bible describes Him—a powerful spirit being who is eternal and transcendent.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Rom. 1:20)

So which is the more sophisticated view? That the universe into being from nothing and by nothing (contrary to all demonstrable scientific principles) or that the universe came into being by a powerful God who has always existed?

#2—It offers the best explanation for the complexity of our universe.

How can we explain how so many finely-tuned conditions could have come together to bring about the universe' existence and our place in it? Physicists who know best the complexity of the universe point out that the odds of a life-sustaining universe are infinitesimal. Many of them confronted with the ridiculous nature of odds of a chance universe have found the solution in many parallel worlds to our own and the idea that we just happened to be lucky enough to be on the one world where the possibility of a life-sustaining universe exists. Yet once more, the Scriptures offer a sublimely simple solution.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1:1)

The creator ordered the universe He made to be suitable for life. Everything was arranged for human habitation. Reading Genesis we may miss how that in the first three days God creates the structures of the universe and in the second three days fills them with creatures. So which is the more sophisticated view? That this life-sustaining universe happened merely by chance among millions of theoretical parallel worlds? Or that our life-sustaining universe was ordered by an intelligent being who possessed the power and knowledge to make it occur?

#3—It offers the best explanation of the moral sense of human beings.

No matter where you go, people have a sense of right and wrong—that there are some things people should do and things they should not do. Even atheist have this moral sense.

But how can this moral sense be explained without God? Morality would only be an illusion, the simple result of a chance combination of chemicals in our brains that caused us to so think.

Or, to put it another way: if we are nothing more than the product of chemical processes, why would a human being be charged with wrong-doing in taking another life? Did you ever hear of a malfunctioning red light being arrested and taken to court for causing an accident that killed someone? Why not? Because it's an amoral machine! But if God doesn't exist, human beings aren't any different from machines. They are just a more sophisticated machine.

Consider once more how that from the beginning the Bible affirms human uniqueness and moral accountability.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Gen. 1:26)

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:16-17)

If then such a God exists, then miracles become not only possible but probable. If indeed God exists and if He can intervene in His creation, then miracles are possible.

A God who has the power to create the wind and the sea has the power to control them to bring deliverance to His people at the Red Sea.

A God who has the power to create fire, lightning, thunder, and earthquakes has the power to marshal them in the amazing theophany of His appearance on Mount Sinai.

A God who has the power to create the ability of human beings to have children can intervene and create a child in the womb of Mary without a human father.

A God who has the power to create life, infusing His breath into a body made from the dust of the earth, can intervene in the tomb of Jesus and raise Him up from the dead.

What miracle is not possible if God exists? Why is it a problem to believe in miracles?

If indeed God exists and if He can intervene in His creation, then miracles are also probable.

How better could God make known His presence among men in this creation than to act exceptionally to the created order to indicate His approval of His prophets and His presence with His people?

The miracles of the Scripture then are the expected display of the power of the God who made all things. God's existence and miracles support each other. God's existence makes possible the performance of miracles; the miracles of Scripture point toward the existence of a powerful God.

Conclusion: Though the Bible describes events that are, compared to the ordinary course of events, seemingly incredible, they become credible when we consider all the evidence. It is more reasonable to believe that to accept the alternative explanation. This is no intellectual leap in the dark. We didn't ask you to check your brain at the door. Instead we have shown that faith in the miracles of the Bible is the result of reasoning with the evidence around us.

Such faith is a first step toward God. It leads us to seek to know Him and what He had in mind for us in creating us.