

## Miracles and History

[[Notes]]

Auburn Affirmation attacks miracles esp. Virgin Birth and Resurrection.

We should defend the Bible.

1 Peter 3:15: Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason.

Phil. 1:17: I am set for the defense of the gospel.

Defend the whole. A general does not abandon half his positions to an invader. Easier to defend all. Bible teaches a system. Sermon deals with one point: To justify miracles and to show their importance.

Materialism ruled out miracles and all religion. Indeterministic physics called friend of religion. But not friend of Christianity (Greeks bearing gifts).

Bible does not teach indeterminism, but Sovereignty. Not a haphazard world. God's promises are sure because god controls the world.

His plan: Genesis 45:8: So now it was not you who sent me hither, but God. Psalm 135:6: Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.

Miracles a part of God's plan. Unless God can do as he pleases, unless he controls the world, his promises are doubtful and miracles have no significance. (Can we believe in God - He performed miracles he has told us about. Can we believe?)

David Hume defines miracles as a "transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of God."

Contrary to all experience: never happened. cf. Archbishop Whately on Napoleon.

(Note: some miracles are not such transgressions. Others are. Red Sea as Resurrection. We must meet the difficulty.)

[[Body]]

The miracles which are the stumbling blocks for so many are those which apparently break the laws of nature. To meet such objections to Christianity, one must grasp clearly what is meant by a law of nature. That we may avoid misunderstanding, the phrase could well be changed to "a law of physics." The reason is that no one can suppose a miracle to break a law unless the law in question be known, and the only laws which are known or are thought to be known are the definite results of modern science.

In the next place, before we can compare miracles and laws we ought to know how a scientist comes by his laws. Now, without becoming too technical, let it be stated that the empirical data with which the physicist works, the observations which he actually makes, are inexact. His readings always include a variable error. This means that while empirical observation always fixes limits between which the law must be made, empirical observation never discovers any one law. The observations set limits, but the actual, definite, mathematical law depends on the choice of the scientist. He may choose a law for personal, or aesthetic, or moral reasons, but he chooses the law rather than discovers it.

In the next place, the miracles which the Christian is interested in defending, lie outside the range of experiment. They do not directly concern the motions of hypothetical point-centers of force. Rather they are events of history, just as the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo. Science has just as much and just as little to do with miracles as with Napoleon. No event of history satisfies the artificial conditions of a physics laboratory.

Finally, therefore, we suggest that in addition to experiment in a laboratory, the scientist in choosing which law he wants should first consult history and after determining by historical evidences what has happened should then choose his laws within the limits of historic actuality. The non-Christian scientist, so it seems to me, proceeds by a reverse and absurd method. He chooses his law to suit himself and then rewrites history to suit his law. I must say that I do not believe that physical science is so advanced as to be able to reconstruct history from laboratory observations.

Even in the case of more ordinary occurrences, the laws of physics do not describe what common opinion considers to be nature itself. The law of the pendulum assumes that the mass of the pendulum is concentrated at a mathematical point and that it swings on a tensionless string from a frictionless point. No such pendulum has ever existed in the visible world. If then the swinging of the pendulum of a grandfather's clock occurs without being invalidated by a law physics, a law well known and mathematically exact, why should the Resurrection of Christ be adjudged impossible through a law entirely unknown and never even approximated. Rather, just as the law of the pendulum has its limits set by real occurrences, so this supposed universal law of physics, if it ever be formulated, will have its limits set by the historical fact of Christ's Resurrection.

The question of miracles therefore is not so much a scientific question as it is an historical question.

[[More Notes]]

Some miracles relatively unimportant but Virgin Birth and Resurrection important. Aside from the desire to disbelieve in miracles, the attack on the Virgin Birth centers on the account in Luke 2:1- and the Roman census. Objections: (1) There was no census, (2) There was but it did not extend to Palestine, (3) Even if it had, Joseph and Mary would not have gone to Bethlehem, (4) No census before A.D. 6, (5) Quirinius was not governor during Herod's life time.

Sir William Ramsay – on Galatians, archaeologists.

Virgin Births in pagan religions – J.G. Machen

Virgin Birth important – essential to a [[?]] Christianity

But the Resurrection is of supreme importance – stands out above all other miracles.

1 Cor. 15:17: If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain.

In Acts: Twelfth apostle chosen as a witness to the Resurrection. Every sermon mentions the Resurrection.

Better attested historically than most ancient history. 500 witness – hallucinations for 40 days and never again?! Five written accounts (not five for Caesar's Wars). Change of Sabbath = required a tremendous [[?]]

Discrepancies: Dr. George A. Buttrick – Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, "The Christian Fact and Modern Doubt."

Angels: Matthew has one angel outside sitting, Mark has one angel inside sitting, Luke has two angels inside standing. This requires merely average intelligence but Buttrick thinks it casts doubt on the Resurrection.

To accept Xenophon, Thucydides, and reject Matthew, Luke, Paul is merely religious prejudice. Because the Resurrection is so outstanding, all the miracles are essential to Christianity.

Bible a record of God's redemptive acts for men – intervention in history. Hence to deny miracles = to deny that God redeems.

Christianity an historical religion. Philosophy and science deal with the abstract or the repeated. Christianity insists on unique events. Once for all. Crucifixion. Resurrection = a judgment. Stoics on Mars Hill.

We look back to past events: Creation, Flood, Exodus, Crucifixion. Look forward to Christ's return and the Consummation.

Rethinking missions removes significance from the past but most obviously, as Dr. Machen said, has no hope for the future. It does not look for intervention but trusts forces now at work.

The Christian Church was begun in the face of great opposing forces – persecution – It was like a little boat launched on a stormy sea. Today also the Church of Christ is tossed by the billows of a perilous present, and buffeted by the waves of unbelief, is sailing to an unknown future. Master, carest thou not that we perish? Like a little boat we launch on the ocean of the unknown future, buffeted by the world of opposition. Master,

Carest thou not that we perish

How canst thou lie asleep

When each moment so madly is threatening

A grave in the angry deep.

The winds and the waves shall obey thy will

Peace, be still

Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea

Or demons, or men, or whatever it be

No waves can swallow the ship where lies

The Master of ocean, of earth, of skies.

They all shall sweetly obey thy will

Peace, peace, be still.