

MIRACLES AND REVELATION: THEIR PRECONDITIONS

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Miracles and Revelation: Their Preconditions

Introduction

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle. Believe in your heart that you’re meant to live a life full of passion, purpose, and miracle.”¹ Albert Einstein

What exactly is a miracle? Does it take revelation to perceive a miracle, or is revelation a precondition necessary before miracles can be realized, or made manifest in the lives of those who believe. From the beginning of time, the creation of the world was and remains a miracle;

¹ Albert Einstein, “*Quotes about miracles*” retrieved from Goodreads > quotes > tag > miracles (accessed November 5, 2017).

the virgin birth of Christ, to His earthly ministry, death on the cross, resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven, all are miracles. This denotes that miracles are the foundation of the Christian faith, with Christ Jesus being the medium for which the miracles are made manifest. Without Christ birth and resurrection, and His works of 30 years in His earthly ministry, then as Christians, our faith would be in vain, and preaching the word of God, futile.

Miracles: The Precondition of the Supernatural

According to Geisler, “Before miracles can be identified, to say nothing of verified, it must be defined; there is no way to find a miracle unless we know what we are looking for.”² In the world of academia and sciences, along with Theologians, there are various definitions for miracles which can fall under either a weak or strong sense. Augustine (354-430) describes a miracle as a portent [that] is not contrary to nature, but contrary to our knowledge of nature. From a strong sense Aquinas defines a miracle as an event that is beyond nature’s power to produce and that only a supernatural power (God) can do.”³ David Hume (1711-1776), Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), and Anthony Flew argue that miracles are a violation of the laws of nature. According to Paul Davies (1995), “To me, the true miracle of nature is found in the ingenious and unswerving lawfulness of the cosmos, a lawfulness that permits complex order to emerge from chaos,”⁴ daily, which Geisler describes as “a divine intervention into the natural world.”⁵ Nichols proposes that a “miracle is an event that is consistent with, but transcends, natural processes.”⁶ The natural processes or law being, the usual, ordinary way the world functions (according to the theistic view), will of God, therefore miracles can be viewed as supernatural acts

² Norman L Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 36.

³ Ibid., 36.

⁴ Terence L. Nichols, *Miracles in Science and Theology*. *Zygon* 37(3), 703.

⁵ Norman L Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 35.

⁶ Terence L. Nichols, *Miracles in Science and Theology*. *Zygon* 37(3), 703.

that are not anti-natural. That is, “ when a miracle occurs, it is not a violation or contradiction of the ordinary laws of cause and effect, but rather a new effect produced by the introduction of a supernatural cause,”⁷ God.

Biblical Perspective of Miracles

In both the old and new testament the words sign, wonder and power are used to describe the supernatural event, with each word delivering its own meaning. According to Geisler, when the three meanings are combined, we gain a comprehensive perspective of biblical miracles.

The word sign (oth, in Hebrew), usually denotes a natural thing, and was first used in the Old testament, in Exodus 3:12 (NKJV), when God was telling Moses “I will be with you,” as He delivers Israel out of Egypt and they will serve Him. However, in the New Testament, sign in Greek is *semeion*, is used for ordinary events, but denotes divine significance, such as Jesus turning water into wine (John 2:11), or when Jesus spoke of His own resurrection (John 2:19; Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 20:19).

The use of the wonder, is typically used along with the word sign, depicting a supernatural divine significance. Whether *Mopheth* in Hebrew, or *Teras* in Greek which means “a miraculous sign, prodigy, portent, omen, wonder, it carries with it the idea of that which is amazing and astonishing, (Ex. 4:21; Ps.78:43; 105:27; Acts 2;19; matt. 24;24).”⁸

The word power in Hebrew is *koak*. It sometimes refers to human power, but more often refers to God’s supernatural power such as in the story of creation (Gen 1; Jer. 10:12; 51:15). In

⁷ Norman L Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

the New Testament, power (dunamis) is used with signs and wonders, such as in Act 1: 8; Rom. 1:6; Luke1:35.

Theological Perspectives of Miracles

Sign, wonder and power delineates an aspect of a miracle. A miracle is an unusual event (wonder) that conveys and confirms an unusual message (sign) by means of unusual ability (power). From the divine vantage point a miracle is an act of God (power) that attracts the attention of the people of God (wonder) to the Word of God (by a sign).

Respectively, these words designate the “source” (God’s power), the “nature” (wonderful, unusual), and the “purpose” (to sign-ify something beyond itself) of a miracle. The purpose of miracles are:

1. To glorify the nature of God (John 2:11; 11:40)
2. To accredit certain persons as the spokesperson for God (Act 2:22; Heb. 2:3-4)
3. To provide evidence for belief in God (John 6: 2, 14; 20: 30-31).⁹

“Therefore, the true task of and responsibility served by a theology of a miracle consist in the defense of the possibility and importance of God’s manifest presence and actions in our desolated world.”¹⁰

Dimensions of Miracles

An Unusual character

Because miracles are unusual supernatural events occurring in the natural, it naturally attracts the attention of those able to perceive them.

A Theological context

⁹ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰ Jean-Pierre Fortin (2017). Christ Risen, Wonder Arising: A Christian Theology of Miracles. *Toronto Journal of Theology* 1, 26. DOI: 100.3138/tjt.3.3.suppl_1.25

A theistic God makes miracles possible. It presupposes, because miracles are divine acts of God, then there is a God who can and will act when He determines too.

A Moral Dimension

“Miracles are visible acts that reflect the invisible nature of God,”¹¹ which is perfect and good.

A Doctoral Content

“Miracles in the bible are connected directly or indirectly with “truth claims,” meaning that there is a message in the miracle; a sign that confirms the sermon, new revelation and divine confirmation.”¹²

A Teleological Aspect

Miracles have a clear purpose, to glorify God, to bring people into the saving grace of Christ Jesus. “The miracles of Jesus thus act as revelation. Affirming God’s free offer of redemption made and fulfilled in Jesus, miracles are personal invitations to believe in God, manifestations of supernatural power primarily intended to elicit faith.”¹³ Additionally, “matter and nature do not oppose or deny the spirit and the supernatural; rather, their full actualization depends directly on the latter’s existence and action within and upon them.”¹⁴

Revelation: The Revelational Precondition

Based on the inerrancy of the word of God and the many miracles demonstrated in the New Testament, a theistic God was consistently revealed through Christ Jesus in His earthly ministry.

“Pannenberg holds that is important for systematic theology to be as coherent as possible, and

¹¹ Norman L Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 36.

¹² Ibid., 39.

¹³ Jean-Pierre Fortin (2017). Christ Risen, Wonder Arising: A Christian Theology of Miracles. *Toronto Journal of Theology* 1, 27. DOI: 100.3138/tjt.3.3.suppl_1.25

¹⁴ Ibid., 27.

when theory is about God, it is crucial that the theory is based on revelation. The only thing human beings can know about God is what God has revealed.”¹⁵

Today, God continues to reveal Himself through general revelation (nature) and specific revelation (in scripture). However, according to Geisler, divine revelation is not possible unless at least three basic things are in place:

- A Being capable of giving a revelation
- A being capable of receiving a revelation
- A medium through which revelation can be given.¹⁶

Therefore, since a theistic God is omniscient and omnipotent, through His sovereignty, He not only has the ability to create, which is a miracle within itself, but He also determines the means by which His Truth is revealed. Additionally, God created men in His image and likeness, that is we are “rational, moral and finite beings, capable of receiving a rational and moral revelation through nature (Rom. 1:19-20) or scripture (2 Tim.. 3: 16-17), from an infinite God.”¹⁷ What a miracle, the infinite mind of God communicates with the finite minds of His people, therefore, both God and men have a common ability to rationally reason, and understand. According to Aquinas, “the mode in which concepts are conceived is always finite for human beings, but what these concepts signify is not necessarily finite.”¹⁸

General Revelation

According to Ward, the ‘critical theologian’, who may or may not belong to any religious tradition, is retired to decide what counts as revelation, not only from his or her own tradition but from all religious traditions. ‘It is not enough to accept the canon of Scripture just as it stands as the starting-point of theology. For we will not know just what is authoritatively contained in Divine revelation until we have first decided what the

¹⁵ Atle Ottesen Sovik (2010). Why Christian Theology Should Accept the Miracles Occur. *Science & Christian Belief*, 22(2), 154.

¹⁶

Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 49.

¹⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁸ Ibid., 110.

character and authority of that revelation is.¹⁹ (Ward, 1994, p. 382)

God continues to reveal Himself (truth) through His creation, whether it is viewed through our physical surroundings, human nature or history. In everything, tangible or intangible, God reveals Himself. Psalm 19:1-4 declares, “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.....their words to the ends of the world.”

God is revealed in nature in two basic ways: as *Creator* and as *Sustainer*. He is the cause of the *origin* as well as the operation of the universe. The first speaks of God as the originator of all things: By him all things were created and in him all things *hold together* (Col. 1:16-17); God *made* the universe and He also sustains all things by his powerful word (Heb. 1:2-3); He *created* all things and by Him all things “*have their being*” (Rev: 4:11).

In addition to being their *originator*, God is also the sustainer of all things. He was active not only in the universe’s *coming to be* but is also active in its *continuing to be*. The psalmist refers to this latter function when he says of God: “He makes springs pour water into ravines.....He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth” (104;10,14).²⁰

Because God is the infinite cause of our finite existence, and though His thoughts and ideas exceed our, we have the ability to express His thoughts in such a way that resembles Him

¹⁹ Keith Ward. Review of Religion and revelation: A theology of revelation in the world’s religions, *Journal of Religion*, (1994), 382.

²⁰ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 51.

because we are made in His image and likeness. “At best Religious language can make valid predictions of God’s essence, but it can never express His essence fully.”²¹

Special Revelation

As stated earlier, God not only reveals himself in the world but also in His Word. Regardless as to who, when or where revelation is perceived, it is the truth. That is, “God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor the son of man, that He should repent. Has He Said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good” (Num. 23: 19)? “God is truth and perfect, therefore He cannot err, hence the bible is true and without err. The problem does not lie in the inerrancy of the Word, but with men’s interpretation of the Word. Hence their perceived revelation, whether through general or specific revelation, can be skewed.

Special revelation is also how “God has chosen to reveal Himself through miraculous means such as physical appearances of God (Gen. 3:18, 18:1; Ex. 3:1-4), dreams (Gen.28:12; Dan.2), visions (Dan. 7:2; 2 Cor. 12:1-7) and Jesus Christ.”²²

The revelation of God in Jesus is decisive, while different manifestations of God in the Old Testament only partly reveal God. According to Pannenberg, the Old Testament receives authority in so far as it prepares and prophesies about God’s revelation in Christ.²³ Spinoza argues that, “that God cannot be known through miracles. God is only known by means of clear and distinct premises, but miracles are events that are not understood and thus cannot be the basis of true knowledge,”²⁴ as it contradicts the laws of nature.

²¹ Ibid., 113.

²² “What is General revelation and special Revelation” retrieved from <http://www.gotquestions.org/general-special-revelation.html> (accessed November 10, 2017).

²³ Atle Ottesen Sovik (2010). Why Christian Theology Should Accept the Miracles Occur. *Science & Christian Belief*, 22(2), 156.

²⁴ Warren Zev Harvey (2013). Spinoza on Biblical Miracles. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 74 (4), 663.

Calvin, on the other hand argues that scriptural revelation, both of God the creator and God the Redeemer, fills out, adds to and deepens human beings' natural knowledge of God. Natural Revelation has been active in the world ever since the moment of creation, and the seed of religion is present in the individual 'from his mother's womb.' Natural revelation is a human being's first point of access to God. On another and much higher level, natural knowledge of God is secondary and subordinate to biblical knowledge. The latter goes far beyond the former in the truths about the creator it communicates (especially the doctrine of the Trinity), and it is only through scripture that human beings may come to a knowledge of God the redeemer.²⁵

Prophecy and Revelation

What exactly is prophecy and how is it related to revelation? Is the prophetic, Revelational, and therefore miraculous in itself? Prophetic Revelation has gone forward from the inception of the Church and this spiritual gift continues to this present day.

Christian prophecy has little to do with predicting the future, but to proclaim the word of God : "to speak forth,"²⁶ or to reveal a message or disclose knowledge from God, that may not accessed or reveal to many believers.

Regarding the preconditions of Christian prophesy one must therefore say that prophecy, in its material aspects, can never establish anything new regarding the revelation in Christ, and further that it can never say anything that goes against Scriptures. On the other hand, in its formal aspects, prophecy and the prophetic revelations can truly have vast importance for the realization of revelation in history. The innermost being of prophecy thus conceived is an ever- inspired actualization of revelation, adjusted to every particular time in history.²⁷

Therefore, operating in the prophetic is a direct revelation of God, through a mystical experience of the prophet from a divine God. Hence, in essence, prophecy is revelation in every form, and a miracle in itself, when it is viewed from the intricacies of an infinite God,

²⁵ Edward Adams (2001). Calvin's View of Natural Knowledge of God. *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 3(3), 283.

²⁶ Niels Christian Hvidt (1998). Prophecy and Revelation: A Theological Survey on the Problem of Christian Prophecy. *Studia Theologica* 52, 147-161.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

communicating to the finite mind of men, His truth.

According to Hvidt, “The faithful who believes in the authentic experience and mission of a prophet, views the prophetic words as originating not from the mind of the prophet but from God himself. Any believer, genuinely seeking the Truth, would prefer the direct teaching of God to that of a human being. And this is the key to the power of prophecy.”²⁸

Conclusion

To this writer, there appears to be a direct and positive correlation between prophecy and revelation, for both transcend from God, therefore both are miraculous, yet contingent on men’s ability to believe and receive the revelations of God. According to Hvidt, “before revelation is given expression, it cannot be transmitted, nor communicated and thus cannot be received in the life of faith. Belief in revelation presupposes the formal expression of revelation,”²⁹ whether it is general, specific or prophetic revelation.

As perceived in this paper, God has much more to say to His creation, than what is disclosed in the Bible (special revelation). He uses every created thing, creature, and men with their unique gifting’s and talents on this earth (general revelation), to reveal His heart. However, to perceive His work around us, we have to “conceive of communication action oriented toward mutual understanding as the nature of reason, but also of revelation, or at least of the openness to revelation that is a prerequisite to genuine dialogue,”³⁰ with God.

²⁸ Ibid., 158.

²⁹ Ibid., 153.

³⁰ William Franke. A Critical Negative Theology of Dialogue: The Coincidence of Reason and Revelation in Communicative Openness. *The Journal of Religion*, 390.

Though the miracles, general, special and the prophetic revelations of God, are conceived with the finite minds of men, the truth of the revelations are not necessarily finite, as they come from a infinite God. God's word, is a "now" word, therefore our reality, which, "becomes reality anew in every period of time, we must first be open to perceive, believe and receive all that He has for us through His miraculous works.

"One cannot identify the fingerprints of³¹ God on an event unless he first knows what Gods Fingerprints are."

³¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2011), 48.

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