

The Miracles of the Bible

By R. Keith Loftin

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, students will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What are some reasons many people don't believe in miracles today?

Assignment Two

Ask four people—two Christians and two non-Christians—what the word *miracle* means and record their answers. Prepare to share their answers with your group.

Assignment Three

Ask four Christians to choose an answer, true or false, to the following statement: "When God performs a miracle, He breaks the laws of nature." Prepare to share their answers with your group.

Scripture to Memorize

"You are the God who works wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples." Psalm 77:14

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will be able to define *miracle* correctly and explain why science poses no threat to miracles.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

"And one final point," your new science teacher says as he ends the first day of class. "Every year a few religious students feel as if I'm attacking their faith. Honestly, I don't care if you're religious or not. All I care about is *facts* and *science*. Science leaves no room for miracles, so I won't be addressing miracle claims in this class." Would such a speech make you nervous?

Miracles and Scientism

Creation, Jonah in the great fish, the incarnation of Jesus, and Jesus's resurrection—miracles such as these are touchstones of the Christian faith. The Gospels repeatedly tell us that performing miracles was a prominent part of the earthly ministry of Jesus, including raising Lazarus from the dead! In fact, the role of miracles in Christianity is one of its distinctive features.

As Winfried Corduan points out, "In most other religions miracles are merely an added attraction because only the teaching of the religion is what is centrally important about the religion, but Christianity is founded on the miraculous event of Christ's resurrection. . . . Christianity is based not just on the teachings of Christ but also on what He did" (Winfried Corduan, *To Everyone an Answer*, 2004, 162).

In fact, the apostle Paul was willing to hang the entire credibility of Christianity on the truth of the miracle of Jesus's resurrection.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:14–17 out loud.

While miracles are essential to the Christian faith, in contemporary culture we are confronted with widespread *disbelief* in miracles. The most common challenge to belief in miracles is the assumption that miracles are somehow at odds with science and should therefore be rejected.

One major reason for this assumption is the idea that scientific beliefs are supported by *evidence*, whereas faith beliefs are simply *opinions*. People in our culture tend to associate science with reliable knowledge about reality. Think how many commercials on TV feature actors wearing lab coats. In fact, many people simply assume that science is our *only* source of knowledge about the world. This idea is called "scientism." This idea lies behind such statements as, "I'll only believe it if it can be scientifically proven."

Assignment One Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on reasons people do not believe in miracles.

Scientism's Failure

Disciples need to know that scientism is not *science*. The two are not the same thing and should not be confused. Science is the endeavor to explain natural phenomena. Christians need not and ought not think that science, in and of itself, is in conflict with Christianity. In fact, Christianity and science have a long and fruitful friendship. Indeed, the celebrated astronomer of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, Johannes Kepler, considered scientific discovery to be "thinking God's thoughts after Him."

In light of this clarification, we see that contemporary culture confuses science with scientism. Science investigates *natural* phenomena, whereas miracles are by definition *supernatural* occurrences and thus beyond the domain of science. This implies no conflict whatsoever, nor does it diminish science. Conflict with miracles arises not from science but from scientism.

It's easy to see why scientism denies miracles. As a theory about knowledge, scientism claims that we can only know that which is discoverable, testable, and provable scientifically. We know that science focuses on and is restricted to the natural world. When you think about that, you realize scientism implies that the *natural* world is all that exists. In other words, scientism implies that the only things in existence are those things studied by the sciences. Of course, if those are the only things that exist, then nothing supernatural exists, and nothing supernatural (miraculous) occurs.

But scientism has serious problems. For starters, we know certain things to be true that scientism cannot account for. For example, consider truths of goodness and beauty, such as, "This painting is beautiful." Or truths such as, "I'm thinking about the *Mona Lisa*," which is something I can know to be true but which cannot be known scientifically. The fact that we know these kinds of truths and scientism cannot account for them means scientism is not our only source of knowledge about reality.

But the most crippling problem with scientism is that it is self-refuting. When a claim is self-refuting, it undercuts itself: the sentence, "There are no true sentences," is self-refuting because it is itself a sentence that would have us believe no sentences are true. Now, think about the claim: "All true knowledge comes via science; only those things discoverable, testable, and provable by science count as knowledge."

Culture regards this as a true claim. But notice that this claim itself is not discoverable, testable, and provable scientifically! The claim of scientism is not itself a scientific claim; it is a philosophical claim *about* science. But scientism itself asserts that we cannot know anything outside of science! In short, if scientism is true, then we know that scientism is not true—and that is self-defeating.

Assignment Two Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the meaning of the word *miracle*.

On Your Own

In the space below, write a brief prayer. Praise God for His creation, and thank Him for allowing us to learn more about it through science.

Miracles and Science

Whether Christians have absorbed the scientism of culture or because they have never given it much thought, many Christians simply don't know how to think about miracles. We overuse the word *miracle* to include things like finding an open parking spot at the mall the week before Christmas or an unlikely sports victory, but such usages only dilute the biblical concept of miracles.

Assignment Three Feedback

The student who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report whether Christians think the following statement is true or false: “When God performs a miracle, He breaks the laws of nature.”

Many Christians adopt the typical cultural definition of *miracles* as “violations of the laws of nature.” But this isn’t a good definition. When God performs a miracle, He has not thereby “broken” the laws of nature any more than catching a falling object means you “break” the law of gravity. These so-called “laws” are simply our best descriptions of how the natural world behaves in the absence of interference—but, of course, a miracle *is* an interference.

Read Psalm 77:14 out loud.

God acts and nature accommodates this event. A better definition of *miracle*, then, is “an event performed supernaturally, beyond the ability of the natural order.” This is just what we see throughout the Old Testament and at the center of the gospel.

Discussion Questions

What do you think of this lesson’s definition of *miracle*? Does distinguishing between scientism and science remove the perceived conflict between science and miracles? What expressions of scientism have you seen or heard in culture?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven.

Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart (the real you) for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something in your life for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit says to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

The Bible is filled with miracle stories. The miracles of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus lie at the center of the gospel. Miracles are central to the Christian faith.

It is widely assumed in the culture, however, that miracles and science are somehow in conflict and that miracles should therefore be rejected. This assumption, though, is based on confusion between science and scientism (the idea that science is the only reliable source of knowledge about reality). Once we recognize the failure of scientism, we see there's no conflict between science and miracles.

Christians need not and ought not think that science, in and of itself, is in conflict with Christianity. In fact, Christianity and science have a long and fruitful friendship.

Many Christians tend to view miracles as violations of the laws of nature. When God performs a miracle, He has not broken the laws of nature. God acts and nature accommodates this event. A good definition of a *miracle* is "an event performed supernaturally, beyond the ability of the natural order." This is just what we see throughout the Old Testament and at the center of the gospel.

Disciples live in awe of mighty King Jesus. By Him all things were created (Colossians 1:16), including all the laws of nature. He is not bound by what He created. He acts as He chooses as He brings His kingdom on the earth. Joining Christ in the power of the Spirit for the glory of God is the grandest adventure possible.

Parent Question

What is a miracle, and does science undermine miracles?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to teenagers who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.

For more information about the entire Making Disciples series, see www.disciple6.com.
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