

A Logical Response to Miracles

What if there were a subject that was so important that you wanted to spend your life sharing it with others? How would you convince them that this subject affects them, too? You could write an article like this one, trying to use sound, step-by-step logic. You could then share that article with others, hoping they'd have a few moments to read it.

Suppose you lived in the first century A.D., and someone came along and started to heal people miraculously. You watched this person as he instantly restored a deformed hand, healed a paralyzed man, gave sight to two blind men, and did so many other things "that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). You watched this healer closely, and you could see that there was no trickery involved in these healings; they were *genuine miracles*. You had never seen anything like this before because ordinary people cannot perform instantaneous healings. (*Note: The New King James Version of the Bible is quoted throughout this article.*)

What would be your emotional response to the miracles? You'd probably respond like the other people who witnessed Jesus' miracles: "they were overcome with great amazement" (Mark 5:42), "they were astonished beyond measure" (Mark 7:37), and "the multitudes marveled" (Luke 11:14). When Jesus performed an amazing work, the onlookers had an intense emotional reaction. Why did they react this way? It's because they had witnessed events that were *genuinely supernatural*.

Did Jesus really exist, and did miracles really occur in the first century A.D.?

The Existence of Jesus

John, one of Jesus' twelve Apostles, testified that Jesus is the Messiah (the Savior who God had promised to send to the world). John wanted to make it clear that the Messiah really had arrived, so Jesus really did exist in the flesh. Read slowly 1 John 1:1–2, and listen to John's sincere words: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life [*Jesus*]*—*the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you. . . ." John testified here that Jesus absolutely existed in the flesh. John declared that Jesus could be heard, seen, and touched . . . the things you could do with someone who was real. This was sincere, believable testimony about the existence of Jesus.

Miracles in the First Century A.D.

Eyewitness Accounts of Jesus' Miracles

John was one of the disciples who traveled with Jesus, so he was an actual eyewitness to many of Jesus' miracles. John 20:30–31 say, "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." Then in 21:24 John said of himself, "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true." John wanted us to understand that Jesus really existed and that Jesus really did perform miracles.

Peter testified that he, too, was an actual witness to Jesus' power: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

All of this is sincere eyewitness testimony about the existence of Jesus and His ability to perform miraculous works.

Paul's Letters to the Christian Churches

Another way to prove that miracles occurred in the first century is to examine the letters of Paul, one of Jesus' apostles. Before we look at Paul's letters, though, let's consider the following scenario:

Suppose you discover a hundred-year-old letter that someone wrote to your great-grandfather. In the letter it says, "When that mountain lion attacked me, you showed great courage when you chased it away." You and I didn't witness that event, but can we be confident that it happened? Yes, because when you write a personal letter to an acquaintance, you write about events that *actually happened* to both of you. You wouldn't fabricate a dramatic event in your letter, because both you and your acquaintance would *know* it was fabricated. If that animal attack had never happened to them, it would have been absurd to write about it.

This same logic can be applied to Paul's letters. The Bible includes two personal letters that Paul wrote to the church at Corinth (a city in Greece). In the first letter, Paul wrote about the miraculous gifts the Holy Spirit had given to him and the Corinthians, such as the "gifts of healings," "working of miracles," and prophesying (1 Corinthians 12). In the second letter, he wrote, "Truly the signs of an apostle [*Paul*] were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Corinthians 12:12). Just like the animal attack, we can be confident that these supernatural events really occurred. If Paul and the Corinthians didn't have miraculous abilities, it would have been absurd for Paul to write about them. This shows that miracles *really did occur* in the days of the first-century disciples (and we should be confident that Jesus' miracles occurred as well).

The Significance of Jesus' Miracles

The Existence of God

Your emotional response to Jesus' miracles would be amazement, but what would be your *intellectual* response? You would know that no ordinary human can perform instantaneous healings, so you'd try to determine where that power came from. A man named Nicodemus came to the logical conclusion. In John 3:2, he said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." There were others who came to the same obvious conclusion: "they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men" (Matthew 9:8), "all the people, when they saw it [*a miracle*], gave praise to God" (Luke 18:43), and some witnesses said, "God has visited His people" (Luke 7:16).

Jesus Himself stated in John 5:36 that the miracles proved that God was with Him: ". . . the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me."

Nicodemus and the others understood that when Jesus performed miracles, He was demonstrating the power of God. The miracles tell us that God exists. That's logical: God and His power would *have* to exist in order for instantaneous healings to occur.

The Fulfillment of Messianic Prophecies

Another way to show that God exists is to examine the prophecies in the Bible. To prophesy was to foretell an event in such detail that it required supernatural direction. The Bible contains many prophecies, including more than 300 about the Messiah (or Savior). Among these Messianic prophecies are Micah 5:2 (He would be born in Bethlehem), Zechariah 9:9 (He would enter Jerusalem on a donkey), Zechariah 11:12 (He would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver), Isaiah 53:7 (He would be silent before His accusers), and Psalm 22:16b (He would die by crucifixion—an astonishing prophecy since crucifixion didn't exist at the time this prophecy was written).

Notice that these five prophecies are not vague descriptions about the Messiah; they are precise, detailed facts about Him. Each of these five prophecies was fulfilled in Jesus; in fact, *all 300* Messianic prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus. Luke 24:44 tells us that Jesus once said to His disciples, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."

The book of Matthew identifies many fulfilled prophecies. Matthew wrote his book primarily to show the Jews that Jesus had fulfilled the Messianic prophecies, thereby proving that Jesus was the Messiah. To leave the Jews with no excuse for disbelieving, Matthew highlighted those prophecies with such phrases as "for thus it is written by the prophet" (2:6), "that it might

be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (2:15), "then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet" (2:17), and "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet" (8:17).

Why is it remarkable that one man—Jesus—fulfilled more than 300 prophecies? Suppose that you want to describe a man who hasn't been born yet. Form a group of twenty-five people. Ask each person to write down twelve specific things that might happen in the life of this future man. Ask one person to include a description of the man's birth, and ask another to describe the man's death. When everyone has finished writing, there will be a total of 300 predictions. What are the chances that one future man will fulfill all 300 of your group's predictions? There would be virtually no chance, of course. How, then, did the Old Testament writers record more than 300 accurate predictions about the Messiah?

It would require supernatural ability to predict those future events. Where did people get this ability? The answer is found in 2 Peter 1:20–21: "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Paul backed up Peter when he wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16a, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

The Bible is a book of actual divine prophecy and fulfillment. These fulfilled prophecies prove that God exists. Without the help from an all-knowing Source—God—how could people possibly have made hundreds of accurate predictions? How could people have *written* about the future without the help from Someone who *knows* the future?

Jesus' Teaching Was from God

In John 3:2, Nicodemus said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Nicodemus could see that Jesus' miracles demonstrated the power of God; therefore, God was with Jesus. Because God was with Him, Jesus had the authority to speak for God. Jesus taught the things that God wanted Him to teach. In John 12:49, Jesus said, "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak."

It would certainly be wise to obey God, and since Jesus was *speaking* for God, wouldn't it be wise to obey Jesus, including His teachings about salvation?

The Need for Salvation

No person except Jesus has ever obeyed God perfectly. Any disobedience to God is called sin. Because none of us can obey God perfectly, we're all sinners (Romans 3:23). God's penalty for sin is eternal death (Romans 6:23), which means that when our physical lives have ended, we would face eternal separation from God.

God loves us, however, and He doesn't want us to be separated from Him. Second Peter 3:9 says that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." God offers us *salvation*—a way (and the *only* way) to avoid His penalty for sin. When we're saved, we'll have eternal life with our Creator instead of eternal separation from Him.

The key to our salvation is the Gospel of Christ. Paul explains what the Gospel is in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

The Bible teaches that the only way to be saved is through Jesus. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by dying in our place (as our substitute). To be saved, we must come into contact with the saving blood of Jesus, and to do that, we must comply with God's conditions discussed on the next page ("God's Plan of Salvation").

It's important to know that salvation can't be earned; in other words, we won't be saved by doing good deeds. Instead, Ephesians 2:8-9 tell us that we are saved by God's grace. Grace is kindness that is not deserved and cannot be earned, and we can only receive the gracious gift of salvation if we comply with God's conditions. It's because of God's grace that we have the plan of salvation.

In harmony with Jesus' teaching in Luke 8:4-15, there are four different ways in which people respond to the offer of salvation: some people simply reject it; some eagerly accept it, but their zeal is short-lived; some accept it, but they aren't enthusiastic about it; finally, some accept the offer of salvation and experience productive Christian lives, remaining faithful to God and His teachings.

Although it's sad to say, Jesus taught that most people will not accept the offer of salvation. Matthew 7:13-14 say, "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

People who aren't found in a saved condition when they die will have no hope of salvation or reconciliation with God at that point. We have to make a life-or-death decision: we can accept God's offer of forgiveness, via His conditions, and receive eternal life, or we can reject His offer and be condemned to eternal separation from Him.

As Paul encouraged the Corinthians to do, I encourage you to be saved *today*: "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Besides, there's no promise of tomorrow, as James wrote in 4:14: "You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

The Logical Conclusion

Here is a five-step chart that shows why all people need to be saved:

1. Miracles really did occur in the first century:
 - a) the eyewitness testimony from John and Peter showed that Jesus performed miracles, and
 - b) the personal letters from Paul showed that Paul and some of the early Christians also performed miracles.
2. Since miracles really did occur in the first century, logic tells us that God exists. God and His power would *have to* exist in order for instantaneous healings to occur.
3. Jesus' miracles proved that God was definitely with Him.
4. Since God was with Him, Jesus had the authority to speak for God. When Jesus taught, He was teaching the Word of God. When we obey Jesus' teachings, we're obeying *God's* teachings.
5. Jesus taught that we need to be saved. Jesus was speaking for God, and people should have a desire to obey God and be saved.

Do you believe that this chart is a logical progression, and that it should give people the desire to be saved? If so, I hope you'll become a child of God by complying with the conditions for salvation on the next page.

There are some who will see the logic in this chart, but unfortunately they won't act on it. People can be logical about most issues in their lives, but when it comes to salvation—the most *important* issue—they suddenly become illogical. If the chart makes sense to you, you should follow your wisdom and have a desire to be saved.

For additional information, I encourage you to visit the website www.ASiteForTheLord.com. That site contains a great deal of information about becoming a Christian and living a Christian life. If you have questions or comments about this article or about that website, please contact the webmaster/author of that site in one of the ways listed on his contact page. If you'd like to study with someone in person, please contact the webmaster; there's an excellent chance he knows of someone in your area who'd be happy to meet with you. You may also contact me at mark1230@sunflower.com. I'd be very glad to hear from you.

God's Plan of Salvation

1. Hearing and Believing

The first step to receiving salvation is to hear about Jesus (Romans 10:17). We then have to make a decision: Do we believe that Jesus is Who He claims to be? To comply with this first condition of salvation, we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus said, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

It's easy to show that Jesus is the Son of God:

- God Himself testified of Jesus' divine nature. When Jesus was on the mountain, a voice from Heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 17:5), and Peter testified that he, James, and John heard this voice (2 Peter 1:18). In Psalm 2:2, in conjunction with Psalm 2:7, it was prophesied that the Messiah would be the Son of God, so by proclaiming Jesus as His Son, God was also declaring that Jesus was the Messiah. (See also Hebrews 1:1–9.)
- All people are sinners (Romans 3:10) and all "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Jesus, however, is *without* sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). God is sinless, and since Jesus is sinless, too, this shows the divine nature of Jesus.
- Only God has the authority to forgive sins (Luke 5:21), so when Jesus forgave sins (Luke 5:20), He was demonstrating His deity. Jesus, as the divine Son of God, had the authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6).

Once we've come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and once we've come to realize that we're sinners in need of God's forgiveness, we're ready to complete the remaining conditions of salvation.

2. Confession

In the presence of witnesses, we must confess that Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). Why is this important? It's because Jesus said, "Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32–33). We also see that Romans 10:9–10 directly link confession of Jesus Christ to salvation.

3. Repentance

There are many different lifestyles in the world, but we must live only one way: according to God's instructions in the Bible. We must examine our lifestyle: if we're doing anything contrary to God's Word, we must resolve to stop that sinful action. It may take a lot of courage and effort to change our lifestyle, *but we really can change!* God never asks us to do anything that's impossible (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Luke 13:3 warns that "unless you repent you will all . . . perish." To prove that we've truly repented (changed our way of thinking and living), we must start living according to the Word of God (Acts

17:30). The Bible explains all the changes we need to make, but here's an example to consider *today*:

Matthew 7:12 teaches that "whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them." We'd want others to show love toward *us*, so we should show love toward *others*. We need to make an important decision: Are we going to live *our* way, which leads to eternal separation from God, or are we going to live *God's* way, which leads to eternal life with Him?

4. Baptism

In Old Testament times, God required His people to make an annual sin offering through the sacrifice of animals (Hebrews 10:1–4). Blood from those sacrifices was applied to the people and to the book of the covenant (Hebrews 9:11–22). Why was blood used? It's because blood is essential to life (Leviticus 17:11); in other words, as sin causes spiritual death, blood signifies regained life.

In New Testament times (today), God no longer requires the sacrifice of animals; instead, He now offers forgiveness of everyone's sins through the one-time sacrifice of His own Son, Jesus (Hebrews 9:26b). Just as the animals' blood was applied to people under the old covenant, so Jesus' blood needs to be applied to us today under the new covenant. His blood is applied to us symbolically through baptism, described by God as a burial (immersion) in water (Romans 6:4–5 and Colossians 2:11–12). In fact, baptism symbolizes the very Gospel itself—the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. But baptism is more than just symbolic—it *saves* us (1 Peter 3:21), because at baptism, God grants us a full pardon (remission) of our sins (Acts 2:38). Without water baptism, our sins won't be forgiven; we'll die in our sins, and we'll be eternally separated from God. Water baptism is so important that it's a *command* (Acts 10:48).

We can't be saved outside of *Christ*, and baptism is the only action that puts us *into* Christ (Galatians 3:27). At baptism, we "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4); in other words, we're "born again" (John 3:3 and 3:5)—born into God's family. God becomes our Father, giving us the privilege of addressing Him in prayer (see Luke 11:2, and also see Galatians 3:26–27 in conjunction with 4:6).

5. Live Faithfully

We must persevere in living God's way, being constantly aware of the awful possibility of slipping back into our old lifestyle (1 Corinthians 10:12).

The Bible teaches that we're saved by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8). It also teaches that a Christian—who was once in a saved condition—can *fall* from grace (Galatians 5:4). Grace places us in a saved condition, but *falling* from grace places us in an *unsaved* condition. This clearly shows that a Christian can lose his salvation. Revelation 22:19 warned that God could "take away [*a Christian's*] part from the Book of Life."

Obedience to God must be our top priority. Our salvation is not secure unless we're "faithful until death" (Revelation 2:10c).