

# towards▶belief

## Supernatural

### WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Atheists like Richard Dawkins call the Bible's miracles 'fairly tales'; and imply that anyone with an ounce of commonsense would completely dismiss even the idea of supernatural events out of hand. Miracles are only for the uneducated, gullible or simple-minded to believe.

Of course the Bible does have many supernatural events: creation out of nothing; the flood; the parting of the Red Sea; manna from heaven; the Sun standing still for 20 mins; Jonah being swallowed by a giant fish; Jesus walking on the water; raising the dead; healings; exorcisms; and many others. Even today, many people across the world claim to experience miracles and a spiritual dimension to life.

Is it reasonable for us to believe in miracles and supernatural events? How do we answer those sceptics who deny all aspects of the supernatural? This is topic 3.

### WATCH THE DVD

### OUR WORLD VIEW MATTERS

#### Genesis 1:1-5; Acts 17:16-33

Our worldview or ideology is very important. It determines how we look at, assess and react to our environment. It helps us answer the big questions: who am I? why am I here? is there a spiritual dimension to life? etc Our worldview is the overall perspective from which we see ourselves and others, and how we interpret the world around us. It is determined by our beliefs, what we consider real, true, important and possible and how we perceive the world. A worldview or ideology with a god or gods in it (religious) will be very different to a worldview without any gods(atheistic).

Q1. Describe briefly the worldview presented in the two passages.

The above passages are written from a Biblical worldview perspective. They're directed against various alternative worldviews of the peoples surrounding the writer. In the Bible God is the Eternal One. Creator, Sustainer and Saviour. Time, space and matter were created by this all-powerful God. This differs markedly from the Persian & Greek worldviews where time, space and matter are eternal. For Christians, Jesus is the Risen Lord and death is not the end. This age will end in judgement and life is best lived in a positive relation to God. God's supernatural intervention should not be considered unexpected or irrational.

Q2. What today are the alternative world-views in Australia when it comes to miracles?

- i. **Atheists:** that small but growing % of people, like Dawkins, who offer a purely materialistic and rationalistic view of the universe where there is no god and no possibility of any miracles or supernatural events. Following David Hume, who argued that violations of the natural laws of the universe are impossible, they therefore dismiss supernatural events as logically impossible.
- ii. **Agnostics:** those who live as if the universe is closed. If god exists he is irrelevant and doesn't much interfere in our daily lives. A larger % of Australians fit into this group. They '*don't know*' about miracles and usually ignore any spiritual side to life until suffering, loss or death personally confront them.
- iii. **Vaguely Religious.** These include the new-agers, horoscope readers, spiritualists, other religion observers and some who tick the Christian box. These people are 'vaguely' open to miracles and a spiritual dimension to life.

*To me it comes down to the question of how open-minded are you? Have you closed your mind to the possibility of a god existing, of miraculous interventions? (Amy Orr-Ewing).*

*The first thing to get clearly established (in a Christian world-view) is that the natural order itself is sustained by God and kept in operation by God, and I think there are good arguments for that. That is to say, that God is not just at work when things behave oddly (miracles). God is at work when things behave regularly. (Richard Swinburne)*

## **EYEWITNESSES ARE DISCOUNTED**

**Mark 4:35-41, John 20:30-31, 1 Corinthians 15:1-8**

*David Hume claims there's no credible eyewitnesses for miracles. But even in his own day there were people who claimed to have experienced miracles and he simply dismissed their credibility because 'of course' we know that miracles don't happen.' So (the problem is) it's a circular argument." (Craig Keener)*

Q3. In Mark 4:35-41 Jesus calms the storm. What is the reaction of those who were there? (See also the onlookers' reactions in Mark 1:25-27; 2:10-12; 5:15-16; 6:48-52; 7:36-37) Would they have been 'credible' witnesses? Why or why not? If we were there, how would we have reacted?

Q4. In John 20:30-31 the writer claims that Jesus performed many 'signs' (miracles) that are not recorded in his book; What are some of the 'signs' in John's Gospel and who witnessed them? (See also John 2:11; 4:54; 6:14; 7:21) Why are these 'signs' important?

Q5. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 Paul reassures the Corinthian Christians that their faith in the risen Lord Jesus is solidly grounded. How does Paul do this?

*When I was first searching for God and first investigating the Christian faith, part of it was that I wanted to see that this was a miracle that had a public nature to it, that people had seen, that there was evidence in history that could testify to it, and this is something which I think is really unique about the central miracle of the Christian faith, about the resurrection. This is something that Christians claim many people saw, and that the text of the New Testament claim that many people saw, and that we can go back to those historical documents and date them. (Vince Vitale)*

## **MIRACLES ARE UNPREDICTABLE**

**Matthew 12:38-42, John 20:24-29**

Q6. We all want to see a miracle; it would be both exciting and scary. So why does Jesus warn us against the seeking of miracles/signs?

*Miracles by definition are not predictable. I've had some people say "Well why aren't there more of them in medical journals?" And of course there are a few but you don't have a lot of them in medical journals because scientific journals deal with what is replicable. That's what science is supposed to deal with. I mean it's good that science deals with that. But human relationships are not always replicable. We have to use a different approach to understanding when we look at human relationships and how much more when we're dealing with a God of infinite knowledge and infinite wisdom. .... In my own life, my wife and I had been through seven miscarriages and other things. Saying that God does miracles doesn't mean that miracles happen all the time. And in fact the Biblical understanding of miracles...miracles are just a foretaste, they're just a sample of the promise of the future of God's Kingdom where there will be no more tears, no more death. It's just to let us know that God loves us in the meantime. (Craig Keener)*

## **MIRACLES TODAY**

**John 14:11-14, James 5:13-18**

Q7. What do these passages suggest about miracles happening after Jesus had returned to his Father?

Q8. What is the relationship between prayer and miracles?

*I believe that this (his healing) is purely a miracle that God has done. God is beyond all science and He created us and He can do anything that He wants. I also honestly believe that the doctors did a fantastic job. But when medical science failed, God who is a master of impossibility came through. (Sean George)*

*I have a very firm belief that if you open your heart a little bit to God, He'll do the rest. (Mike Willesee)*

**SUMMARY: What to say to a sceptic of miracles**

- i. Are you even open to the idea of miracles or of God existing?
- ii. There are lots of credible eyewitnesses to the key Bible miracles; e.g. Jesus' resurrection
- iii. Today there are many credible, wise and well-educated people who have personally experienced or witnessed a miracle or God's supernatural intervention.
- iv. If a God existed it's not surprising that he might intervene in His creation. Experience tells us this happens; miracles happen – we just have to trust His wisdom as to when and why.

**SHARING & PRAYER**