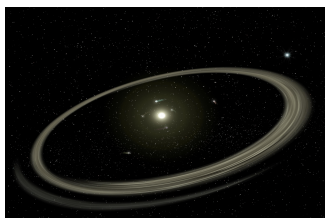




The Armor of Faith
Topic Summary: Miracles and Faith
Miracles of The Old Testament



Public Domain

Introduction

[Greeting:] → Welcome to “The Armor of Faith,” a show where we hope to bring our listeners closer to the Word of God and the blessings we receive through living in the fullness of the Catholic faith. My name is Doug and I will be your host as we discuss the blessings of the Church Christ built upon Peter.

I am joined today by my panel: [names]

Our panelists represent a rather broad background in catechesis gained in support of various parishes as well as a variety of age and spiritual interest groups. So, welcome to our panelists as well as to our listeners.

Let us open with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, we lift up our hearts in thanks and praise for this opportunity to open and share your Holy Word this day. We pray that You are with us and all our listeners as we share with one another the blessings of faith. We pray You will grant us wisdom and understanding as we seek to learn Your Holy Truth.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit we pray.

Discussion:

As a relatively new Catholic, I found myself in a meeting after Mass where a nun was attempting to recruit parents to help out with youth religious formation. I was in the military at the time, and this was typical of military communities due to the constant reassignment of military personnel.

As the nun spoke, she began to explain her desperate need for a catechist for the 13 year olds. Her speech was something to the effect that we do not need to be theologians to teach the children and that we should not think we are incapable of sharing our faith. Essentially, she was

saying that the the most important step towards helping is saying, “Yes.” I was trying my best to meld into the back of the room so no one would really notice I was there. Suddenly the sister turned, looked straight at me, then said, “And don't think I'm not talking about you.”

I was hoping she was looking at someone behind me, but as I looked to my rear, there was only a brick wall. It was like I was suddenly standing in this spotlight and while I had any number of excuses, to include being a Catholic for little more than a year, something told me I couldn't just walk away, so I talked to the nun to find out what I could do to help.

One of the first classes I presented was on the subject of miracles. We obviously hear about miracles in the Bible, but how often do we see them in our modern day? When I asked the question, the teenagers almost responded in unison, “We see it every Sunday when the priest says the prayers to turn the bread and wine into the precious body and blood of Christ.” I had to pause. I was going for the miracles like the parting of the sea or the burning bush that is not consumed. As I pondered their answer, I realized I still had a lot to learn about this new faith to which I had converted – and, of course, I also knew they were right.

Anyway, the point I was attempting to get to is that our faith is not dependent upon witnessing a miracle – remember doubting Thomas – but miracles do have a tendency of capturing our attention and stirring discussion as to the difference between true miracles, illusion, and wishful thinking.

The skeptic does not believe in miracles. Their point is that there is always a scientific explanation, but something appears miraculous to us simply because we haven't discovered the explanation yet. Others look for miracles as a sign or proof of God, but the real question is what impact do miracles have upon our faith? For some, no miracle can shake their disbelief, while for others, miracles are seen as perhaps a cause for faith rather than a confirmation. In other words, we cannot ignore miracles, but we must also consider their meaning to our relationship with God.

Of course, to enable our discussion concerning miracles, we should begin with the definition. According to our friends Merriam-Webster, miracles are defined as:

- 1) “an extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs”
(The healing miracles described in the Gospels)
- 2) “an extremely outstanding or unusual event, thing, or accomplishment”
(The bridge is a miracle of engineering.)

Of course, we are looking to talk about the first option because we are looking at the meaning of divine intervention to our faith. We have heard about miracles, but one question we might have is do we always recognize when we might be a witness to one?

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, miracles are defined as:

MIRACLE: A sign or wonder, such as a healing or the control of nature, which can only be attributed to divine power. The miracles of Jesus were messianic signs of the presence of God's kingdom (547).

Today, we will begin our discussion by looking backwards a few short years and select a few events from the Old Testament to assess their meaning in relation to the people of the day versus how we might experience such an event if it were to happen in our day. Of course, we have the power of hindsight, but is that always perfect? We might also ask, do we have the foresight to ponder how a miracle might ripple through time, and for whom, exactly, is the intended audience for a given miracle?

(Question 1: Of course, we do not have time to talk about every miracle in the Old Testament, but let us reflect on some of the most memorable. When we talk about Old Testament miracles, what comes to mind?)

Let's take what I consider to be the first miracle, "Let there be light."

(Genesis 1:3-5)

3 *Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light.* 4 *God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness.* 5 *God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." Evening came, and morning followed—the first day.*

(Question 2: Thus begins the narrative of our creation. Why would we characterize this as a miracle versus what we are told by scientists that our origin began with the big bang or as explained by some other scientific theory?)

(Genesis 1:26-31)

26 *Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth.*

27 *God created mankind in his image;
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

28 *God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.* 29 *God also said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; 30 and to all the wild animals, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the earth, I give all the green plants for food. And so it happened.* 31 *God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.*

(Question 3: Perhaps something we should note, here, is that when God performed this miracle of light and creation, there was no one to witness as it was not until the sixth "day" that God

created human beings. Does a miracle need a witness for it to be a miracle? How might we be impacted by miracles we do not witness for ourselves?)

(Genesis 3:1-6)

1 Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock beyond the wilderness, he came to the mountain of God, Horeb. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him as fire flaming out of a bush. When he looked, although the bush was on fire, it was not being consumed. 3 So Moses decided, "I must turn aside to look at this remarkable sight. Why does the bush not burn up?" 4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called out to him from the bush: Moses! Moses! He answered, "Here I am." 5 God said: Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. 6 I am the God of your father; he continued, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

(Question 4: Of course, as God introduces himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; not to mention all the conversations in the garden and beyond; this is not the first time God has spoken, but neither was this an every day event in the life of Moses, either. What captured the attention of Moses and for what purpose?)

(Question 5: Let's examine Moses for a second. Despite events of the time, Moses survived the infanticide directed by Pharaoh and was placed in a unique position to be raised by Pharaoh's daughter. We really do not hear anything about the faith of Moses until this moment with God, but we can certainly see that God had positioned Moses called to Moses for a purpose. So what is the nature of this burning bush and what was the result of this miracle? Of course, this moment had a large impact on Moses, but what is the impact to us?)

(Exodus 4:1-9)

1 "But," objected Moses, "suppose they do not believe me or listen to me? For they may say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" 2 The LORD said to him: What is in your hand? "A staff," he answered. 3 God said: Throw it on the ground. So he threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and Moses backed away from it. 4 Then the LORD said to Moses: Now stretch out your hand and take hold of its tail. So he stretched out his hand and took hold of it, and it became a staff in his hand. 5 That is so they will believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you.

6 Again the LORD said to him: Put your hand into the fold of your garment. So he put his hand into the fold of his garment, and when he drew it out, there was his hand covered with scales, like snowflakes. 7 Then God said: Put your hand back into the fold of your garment. So he put his hand back into the fold of his garment, and when he drew it out, there it was again like his own flesh. 8 If they do not believe you or pay attention to the message of the first sign, they should believe the message of the second sign. 9 And if they do not believe even these two signs and do not listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry land. The water you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry land.

(Question 6: So here, we see Moses raise the question, how are people going to believe me? What was the response of God and for what purpose were these supernatural signs designed?)

(Exodus 4:27-31)

27 The LORD said to Aaron: Go into the wilderness to meet Moses. So he went; when meeting him at the mountain of God, he kissed him. 28 Moses told Aaron everything the LORD had sent him to say, and all the signs he had commanded him to do. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered all the elders of the Israelites. 30 Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses, and he performed the signs before the people. 31 The people believed, and when they heard that the LORD had observed the Israelites and had seen their affliction, they knelt and bowed down.

(Question 7: So here, we see the miracles accomplish their purpose in relation to Aaron, the elders, and the people. Why do we think the people believed and what was their response in the moment?)

(Question 8: Of course, after these first signs, the people then witness the plagues and subsequently the parting of the sea as they fled the Egyptian army. It is one thing for us to hear such stories, but what would our reaction be if we witnessed such events?)

(Exodus 32)

1 When the people saw that Moses was delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for that man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him." 2 Aaron replied, "Take off the golden earrings that your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He received their offering, and fashioning it with a tool, made a molten calf. Then they cried out, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." 5 On seeing this, Aaron built an altar in front of the calf and proclaimed, "Tomorrow is a feast of the LORD." 6 Early the next day the people sacrificed burnt offerings and brought communion sacrifices. Then they sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

7 Then the LORD said to Moses: Go down at once because your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted corruptly. 8 They have quickly turned aside from the way I commanded them, making for themselves a molten calf and bowing down to it, sacrificing to it and crying out, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!" 9 I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are, continued the LORD to Moses. 10 Let me alone, then, that my anger may burn against them to consume them. Then I will make of you a great nation.

(Question 9: Wait a second. As we reflect on this moment, were these not the same people that believed as a result of the signs with which God empowered Moses? Were these not the same people that witnessed the fearsome plagues imposed by the Lord upon the Egyptians? Were these not the same people that witnessed the parting of the seas as they fled the army of Pharaoh? What happened that these same people should suddenly seek for themselves a god of

their making? What does this tell us about the nature of people and their perception of miracles?)

Quotes:

Miracles are not contrary to nature, but only contrary to what we know about nature.
– Saint Augustine

Our Lord reserved to Himself certain things which He would do in due time in a manner outside the course and order of nature, so that they would wonder and be astonished at seeing not great but unusual things, who are unmoved by things daily seen. For the government of the world is a greater miracle than feeding five thousand men from five loaves; yet at the former no one wonders, the latter astonishes all men: not as a greater wonder, but as a rarer.
– Saint Augustine

Yes, this is still the age of miracles. We too would work them if we had faith!
– St. Josemaria Escriva

God does not work miracles and grant favors by means of some statutes so these statutes may be held in higher esteem than others, but so he may awaken the dormant devotion and affection of the faithful through his wonderful works.
– St. John of the Cross

Final Thoughts:

In our self-awareness, the recognition that we can sense and experience, we attempt to comprehend the meaning of that which surrounds us. We have no issue with believing in what we can physically sense. We accept it all as nothing unusual. Even when we ponder the origins and the mechanics of our existence, we take almost everything which enables our life for granted.

Miracles appear to us as something we cannot explain, as something out of the common realm of our experience, something which does not appear to be consistent with our understanding of our environment. For some, the supernatural appears as confirmation of a power greater than us. For some, it is a confirmation as to the placement of their faith, while others resist with every fiber, assuming a perfectly natural explanation shall be discovered.

We might wonder, why have we never seen a burning bush or the parting of a sea? We might also wonder as to the meaning if we did experience such things. We could also ponder, if we should experience such a miracle, how would it change our lives?

As we continue in our discussion, we will examine such questions as well as those I asked at the beginning of our show, such as; is the power of hindsight always perfect, do we have the foresight to ponder how a miracle might ripple through time, and for whom, exactly, is the intended audience for a given miracle?

Wrap Up: Well, our time has come to an end. We hope you will be able to join us next week as we continue with part II of our discussion concerning miracles and faith.

Let us conclude with a prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity to open and discuss Your Holy Word. We pray that as we go our separate ways, You will continue to walk with us and help us to see how we may put on the armor of **truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation**, and the **Word** of the gospel not only for the benefit of our lives, but also the lives of all who cross our path. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Thank you all and God bless.

Next Session: Miracles and Faith – Part II: Miracles of the New Testament