

Dr. Robert C. Newman, Miracles, Session 2, New Testament, Apocrypha, and Medieval Periods

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Okay, we've just begun what I guess we could consider seven sessions on the miraculous and the miracles of Jesus. We looked at the first one last time, which basically talked a little bit about defining miracles, and then did a quick survey of Old Testament miracles, and then skipped over miracles of Jesus and the Gospels, went on and looked at the apostolic miracles, largely in Acts. Our next unit here is number two. The miracle counts through medieval times, so we're starting with the post-apostolic period and looking on there.

And we turn now from inspired biblical accounts of miracles to those in non-inspired but nominally Christian literature. We're going to begin with the so-called New Testament Apocrypha, as found in J.K. Eliot's work 1993, and in Hennepin Schneemelcher, 1963. We're just going to make some selections; we're not going to do the whole thing.

So, we're going to look first of all at the Proto-Evangelium of James. This is a narration of the events supposed to have taken place up to the birth of Jesus. It was probably written in the mid to late second century AD and was very influential in church history in the development of devotion to Mary, who is very much, shall we say, magnified in this material.

So, what I'm going to do is give you a chapter-by-chapter survey of what we find in that book. In chapter one, Joachim, a rich and pious Jew, has his offerings rejected because he is childless. He goes into the wilderness to fast for 40 days.

In chapters two and three, his wife Anna is also reproached, and she prays to God for a child. In chapters four and five, an angel is sent to Anna and Joachim, announcing an answer to their prayers. Their offspring will be spoken of throughout the world, and then Mary will be born.

That's their child. In chapter six, Mary walks at six months and is kept at home in a special sanctuary to avoid all defilement. In chapter Seven, Mary is dedicated to the temple at age three, so presumably like Samuel is, and she dances on the steps of the altar.

In chapter eight, at age twelve, to avoid menstrual defilement of the temple, the high priest Zechariah is instructed by an angel to give Mary his wife to a widower whom God shall designate. In chapter nine, Joseph is chosen by a dove coming out of his staff, as opposed to the other widowers who are apparently in this contest, and he takes Mary home. Joseph then, a builder, goes off on a building project.

In chapters 10 through 12, Mary is one of the virgins chosen to make the veil of the temple. Mary receives a message from the angel regarding Jesus. She turns in her veil work and visits Elizabeth.

In chapters 13 through 16, Mary, age 16, is now six months pregnant when Joseph returns. He won't believe her story until the angel appears to him. Her pregnancy becomes known to the priests, who call both in.

They won't believe their stories until they are successful in the bitter water test. Chapters 17 through 18, the decree of Augustus. Mary and Joseph and his kids.

Joseph, you remember, in this story, is a widower, so he has some kids. Mary, Joseph, and his kids go to Bethlehem, but she is about to give birth in the wilderness, so she is put in a cave. As Joseph goes to look for a midwife, the whole world halts at Jesus' birth.

In chapters 19 through 20, Joseph and the midwife see a cloud overshadowing the cave, then great light. The baby climbs up on Mary's breast. The midwife tells her friend Salome, who won't believe in the virgin birth until she tests Mary's virginity.

Salome's hand is consumed as punishment but healed by touching the baby Jesus: chapter 21, the visit of the wise men. In chapters 22 through 24, Herod tries to kill the young children.

Mary hides the baby in an ox manger. Elizabeth and John are hidden by being swallowed up inside a mountain. Herod finds Zacharias, you remember he's John's father, in the temple and has him killed.

His blood turns to stone. The temple walls wail. Simeon is appointed high priest in Zacharias' place.

Chapter 25, I, James, who is Jesus' older stepbrother, wrote this and hid in the wilderness. So that's the Proto-Evangelium of James. Secondly, the infancy story of Thomas was, at one time, called the Gospel of Thomas, but with the discovery of the Gnostic materials of that name, that name was switched away from this one.

So, the infancy story of Thomas. This is a narration of the marvels which supposedly took place in Jesus' childhood up to age 12. Parts of it date back to the late 2nd century AD.

Chapter 1, we are told that this is written by Thomas the Israelite, though Coleman says his book betrays new knowledge of Judaism. Chapter 2, the boy Jesus, age 5,

makes 12 clay sparrows on the Sabbath. When he is confronted, he claps his hands, and the sparrows fly away.

In chapter 3, Jesus is playing in some pools of water. Another boy messes up the pools. Jesus curses the boy, who immediately withers up.

The parents of the boy complain to Joseph, what kind of child do you have? In chapters 4 and 5, another boy runs into Jesus in the village. Jesus curses him, and he falls dead. The parents and others complain to Joseph.

He rebukes the child. Jesus strikes the accusers blind. Joseph pulls Jesus ear.

Jesus warns Joseph not to cross him. Chapters 6 through 8, the teacher Zacchaeus offers to teach Jesus the alphabet, but Jesus rebukes him for not really understanding even Alpha. Zacchaeus, shamed, says this child is not earthborn.

Perhaps he had forgotten it before the creation of the world. He returns the child to the father. Jesus laughs and cancels the curse on all those previously struck.

They are afraid to provoke him again. In chapter 9, Jesus and some children are playing on the roof of a house. One boy falls off and dies.

The parents accuse Jesus. Jesus calls the boy back to life and clears him of responsibility. In chapter 10, a young man cutting wood chops his own foot.

Jesus heals the foot. Arise now, he says, cleave the wood and remember me. Chapter 11, going to fetch water for his mother.

Jesus stumbles, and the pitcher is broken, so he brings back the water in his garment without any of it leaking through. Chapter 12, Jesus, age 8, is planting with his father. Jesus sows one grain of wheat.

It yields 100 measures of wheat, which he gives to the poor. Chapter 13, Jesus and his father make a wooden bed for a rich man. One of the beams is too short, apparently accidentally cut too short.

Jesus stretches it to the right length. In chapters 14 and 15, another teacher strikes Jesus. Jesus curses him, and he falls into a faint.

Later, another teacher takes Jesus as a pupil. Jesus takes up the book but, without reading it, begins to expound the law by the Holy Spirit, and a large crowd gathers. The teacher praises Jesus.

Jesus heals the previous teacher. In chapter 16, Jesus and his brother James are gathering sticks. James is bitten by a snake and about to die. Jesus breathes on the bite. The wound is healed, and the snake bursts. 17, Jesus raises a little child who had died.

Chapter 18, Jesus raises a workman who had died. Chapter 19, Jesus, age 12, remains behind in the temple. The parents find him expounding scripture, putting the elders and teachers to silence.

What's the historicity of these two Gospels? Did Luke really pass all this up for the temple incident at age 12? Do these incidents really fit Luke 2:52? Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor of God and man. It doesn't sound like Jesus was in much favor here and there in various places, huh? Does this really fit Luke 4:22 and 23, where the Nazarenes, wondering at Jesus' gracious words, say, isn't this Joseph's son? Do something here at home in your hometown like you did elsewhere. It does not sound like they are familiar with a half dozen spectacular miracles that Jesus had done before age 12.

Does this really fit Matthew 13:53 to 58 or Mark 6:16? Where do this wisdom and these miraculous powers come from? Isn't this the carpenter's son? Does this fit John 2:11? This miracle at Cana was the beginning of Jesus' signs. So, my reading is that these were invented after the fact and are not real pictures of anything that happened in Jesus' ministry. Other New Testament apocrypha.

A number of the apocryphal acts survive, the earliest from the second and third centuries. The Acts of John, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, the Acts of Peter, the Acts of Andrew, the Acts of Thomas, etc. These apparently seek to supplement the canonical acts, entertain the reader, and propagandize their own particular theological approach.

The Acts of John, Andrew, and Thomas are strongly intuitive. That is, marriage is sinful and not good, so the disciples break up marriages and advocate eating nothing but bread and water. Contrast 1 Timothy 4, 3, that seducing spirits will come and forbid meat and be against marriage, etc.

In the apocryphal acts, miraculous stories are not only exaggerated, producing fantastic and bizarre effects, but they often follow one another as isolated units and are retailed for their own sake. The intention of this is clearly not to demonstrate the wonderful advance of the Word of God but to glorify the Apostles as miracle workers. That's a remark of Hennepin in his book on the New Testament, Book 2, page 174.

Some post-apostolic and medieval miracle accounts. These are found in the book by E. Cobham Brewer, Dictionary of Miracles, published in 1884, which is accessible for

free on the internet, so if you do a Google search, you can find that work. This compilation includes hundreds of ancient medieval and modern miracle accounts of modern up to 1884, categorized alphabetically under three major headings.

One is those imitating biblical miracles. Two, those illustrating biblical texts. And three, those proving Roman Catholic dogma.

These accounts are taken from standard Roman Catholic sources, the *Acta Sanctorum*, Guérin's *The Little Bolandists*, I guess, who will translate the French, since my French's pronunciation is no good, or Tinnisman, *Lives of the Saints*. First of all, miracle accounts imitate biblical miracles. Here, Brewer has 236 headings, covering 346 double-column pages.

I'll pick a couple of examples. St. Barnabas says where his dead body is to be found. Barnabas the Apostle, after being stoned to death, was thrown into a fierce fire that his body might be consumed, but the fire had no effect upon it, and St. Mark, carrying the dead body beyond the gates of the city wall of Cyprus, buried it.

There it remained until AD 485, when Necephorus Callistus assured us, the ghost appeared to Antimus Antimius, Bishop of Cyprus, and told him where his body was to be found. The bishop went to the spot indicated and found the body with the original manuscript of St. Matthew's Gospel, the very manuscript written by the hand of the evangelist himself. Both relics were taken to Constantinople.

Dead elm blooms. The bearer of St. Zenobia died AD 407, happened in passing to touch an elm tree, dead and withered to the roots from old age. The moment it did so, the whole tree burst into leaf, and was covered with flowers.

The tree was looked on by the people with such reverence that everyone coveted a piece as a charmed relic, and the tree ere long was wholly cut away. Marble pillar was then erected on the spot, with an inscription stating what had been said above. When the beer reached the doorway of St. Saviour's Cathedral, it became immovable, and no power of man could force it further on, till Bishop Andrew promised to found twelve chaplains to chant the praises of God in a chapel designed for the dead saint.

Relics join in singing. One night, a deacon watched St. Gregory of Longress, had died AD 541, and saw him rise from his bed and leave his dormitory at midnight. The deacon followed him unobserved and saw him enter the baptistry, the door of which opened to him of its own accord.

For a time, dead silence prevailed, and then St. Gregory began to chant. Presently, a host of voices joined in, and the singing continued for three hours. I think, says St. Gregory of Tours naively, the voices proceeded from the holy relics there preserved.

No doubt, they revealed themselves to the saint and joined him in singing praises to God. Some items are from a list of relics given by John Brady in 1839, but no information is supplied on the location of each. One, one of the coals that burned St. Lawrence, that broiled St. Lawrence.

Two, a finger of St. Andrew, another of John the Baptist, and one of the Holy Ghost. Three, two heads of John the Baptist. Fourth, the hem of our Lord's garment was touched by the woman, who healed of her bloody issue.

Five, a vial of the sweat of St. Michael, when he contended with Satan. Six, some of the rays of the star that guided the wise men. Seven, a rib of the Word made flesh.

Eight, a pair of slippers worn by Enoch before the flood. Nine, Jesus shed a tear over Lazarus' grave. Miracle accounts illustrating biblical texts.

146 headings covered in 128 double-column pages. Out of the mouths of babes, Psalm 8-2. When St. Agnes died on April 20th, 1317, we're told by her biographer that she received the most perfect praise that earth could afford, that of infants at the breast.

The tongue of the little infants was unloosed, and they announced the death of St. Agnes and her virtues, and their parents woke on hearing their voices. God will provide, Matthew 6:25 through 33. St. Franchi, in the 7th century, was employed in making bread for the monastery of St. Martin de la Bretonniere, but some of the brothers, out of envy, wishing to bring him into disgrace, hid the materials used in bread making.

St. Franchi was not the least disconcerted, but making the sign of the cross, he began to knead nothing with nothing and, at the time required, produced his batch of bread in perfect condition. Holiness is better than rubies, Proverbs 3:15. The body of St. Simon Stylites, who died AD 459, was full of sores and covered with maggots.

One day, a maggot fell from the pillar saint at the foot of Basilicus, the king of the Saracens, and the king, picking it up, laid it on his eye, whereupon it was instantly converted into a magnificent pearl, so large, so beautiful, and of such fine water, that Basilicus valued it more than his whole empire. Some miracle accounts prove Catholic dogma, 20 headings covering 52 double-column pages. Body and blood of Christ.

St. Anthony of Padua had a disputation one day with Bonneville on the sacrament of the Mass. Bonneville denied transubstantiation, and Anthony maintained its truth. To convince him, St. Anthony had Bonneville shut up his mule and give it no food for three days.

At the end of this fast, St. Anthony held out to the mule a consecrated wafer, and Bonneville threw it some oats. The mule took no notice of the oats but fell on his knees before the holy wafer, adoring it as his Creator and Lord. Purgatory.

Emilia Piccieri, 13th century, was the superior of the convent of St. Margaret, and compelled the sisters on fast days to abstain even from drinking water in remembrance of Christ's thirst. One of the sisters, Cecilia Margaret, died. Three days afterward, she showed herself to Emilia and said that she had been in purgatory for three days to efface the taint of birth, and on the third day, her guardian angel appeared to her and said, with this water, you were stained from on earth in memory of Christ's thirst, the flames of purgatory extinguished.

Enter now, therefore, into the joys of paradise. Virgin Mary. St. John Damascene and Juvenal, Archbishop of Jerusalem, assert that Adam and Eve, the prophets, all the apostles except Thomas, and many angels were present at the death of the Virgin Mary and attended the funeral procession to Gethsemane.

On the third day after her interment came St. Thomas, entreated that he might be allowed to look upon the deceased lady, so the grave was opened. When lo, the body was gone. It had been taken to heaven.

The odor of sanctity remained in the place where the body had lain, and the linen clothes in which it had been wrapped had been carefully folded together. The apostles were amazed, but they knew that the body had been taken up to heaven to be united to its living soul—some implications of the miracles recorded by Brewer.

This is selected and reorganized from his introductory pages, Roman numerals 19 through 23. These miracles, if they truly occurred and were done by God, attest to the truth of distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines. For instance, the world is divided into two kingdoms.

God's kingdom, the Catholic Church, which one enters on baptism by renouncing Satan, and Satan's kingdom, which includes not only pagans and Muslims but also Jews and Protestants. It's meritorious for saints to injure heretics, such as Lutherans and Calvinists, but a sin if the opposite occurs. There is no salvation outside the Church of Rome.

Its priests can actually absolve you from your sins. Its baptism regenerates. The elements of the Eucharist really are changed in the body and blood of Jesus Christ and can function as miraculous food.

Salvation is the reward of merit, hence the common end to saintly biographies, he was called to heaven to receive the reward of his merits. The lives of saints are

considered the Romantic ideals of perfection, including withdrawing from society, mortification of the flesh, self-torment, suffering, and martyrdom. One of the most meritorious acts of piety is to remain single.

It's possible to be meritorious, to accumulate merit, to transfer merit to others so that the demerits of a sinner may be balanced off by transfer from a saint, what's later called the doctrine of supererogation. Blind obedience to superiors is the first law of piety, no matter how absurd the order, how revolting, how difficult. The perfection of a saint comes when he has crushed out every natural affection.

Nothing on earth must remain, including its hopes, ambitions, and love, not even love for father and mother. A saint should read no secular book, think no secular thought, and hope no secular good. It is proof of merit to be able to work miracles.

It is meritorious to see miracles and believe in them, or at least a demerit to doubt them. Miracles can be performed by dead bodies, relics, and medals, as well as by living saints. Relics can be authenticated by any church dignitary, such as Pope, Abbot, or Bishop.

They can even be multiplied. They possess miraculous virtues, no matter how small they are, which can be transferred so that a relic can make a relic. Saints, after death, have the power of interceding for their votaries before the throne of grace, curing diseases, and visiting Earth.

The Virgin Mary is the highest of all saints, the most powerful, the most merciful. The saints in heaven take an interest in those on earth. They like to be invoked, patronized, honored, flattered, and even dressed up and decked with jewels.

Conclusions. Without time machines, we have no way to be sure that none of these miracles happened. Their inconsistency, however, with the miracles and teachings of Scripture makes it apparent that if they did, God was not their author.

The function of many of these alleged miracles, as Brewer points out, was to move the medieval church away from the teachings of Scripture. As we will suggest in the next talk, they also seem to have moved many in the Renaissance and later away from Christianity altogether. Well, that's where we will quit this second unit, so there we are.

Probably a good time to quit, so we've done three of those. That's some pretty weird stuff there. Yeah, yeah, well, we missed a lot of that because Catholicism has reformed a good deal in the U.S.