

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

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Newman, Miracles, Session 2, New Testament, Apocrypha and Medieval Periods, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This text from Dr. Newman's session explores **miracle accounts beyond the biblical canon**, examining the New Testament Apocrypha, particularly the Proto-Evangelium of James and the Infancy Story of Thomas, highlighting their embellished and theologically divergent narratives. The discussion then shifts to **post-apostolic and medieval miracle stories** compiled by E. Cobham Brewer, categorizing them as imitations of biblical miracles, illustrations of scripture, or proofs of Catholic dogma. These later accounts often feature **exaggerated events, relics with supernatural powers, and saints performing extraordinary feats**, ultimately serving to reinforce specific Roman Catholic doctrines. Newman concludes by noting the **inconsistency of these extra-biblical miracles with scriptural teachings**, suggesting their purpose was to steer the medieval church away from core biblical principles.

2. 28 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Newman, Miracles, Session 2 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament → NT Introduction → Miracles).



**Newman_Miracles_
Session02.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Newman, Miracles, Session 2, New Testament, Apocrypha and Medieval Periods

Briefing Document: Science, Liberalism, and the Rejection of Miracles

Executive Summary: This briefing document summarizes the key themes and examples discussed in Session 2 of Dr. Newman's lecture on miracles, focusing on accounts found in the New Testament Apocrypha and during the medieval period. The session transitions from inspired biblical accounts to non-inspired Christian literature, highlighting a shift towards exaggerated, self-serving, and theologically driven miracle narratives. Newman critically examines the historicity and purpose of these accounts, contrasting them with the canonical Gospels and suggesting their role in shaping medieval Catholic dogma and potentially contributing to later skepticism towards Christianity.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Transition from Biblical to Non-Inspired Miracle Accounts:

- The session marks a shift from the miracles recorded in the Old Testament and the Apostolic Age (covered in previous sessions) to those found in post-apostolic and medieval Christian writings.
- Newman emphasizes the move from "inspired biblical accounts of miracles to those in non-inspired but nominally Christian literature."

2. New Testament Apocrypha:

- **Proto-Evangelium of James:** Focuses on events leading up to Jesus' birth, heavily magnifying the role and devotion to Mary.
- Presents miraculous events surrounding Mary's conception, birth, childhood (walking at six months, dancing at the temple altar), and the selection of Joseph.
- Includes miraculous elements during Jesus' birth in a cave, the halting of the world, and the healing of Salome's hand after doubting Mary's virginity.
- Concludes with Herod's attempt to kill infants and miraculous escapes, including John the Baptist and Elizabeth being swallowed by a mountain and Zechariah's martyrdom.
- **Infancy Story of Thomas (formerly Gospel of Thomas):** Narrates marvels during Jesus' childhood up to age 12.

- Depicts a young Jesus (age 5 onwards) performing numerous miracles, often in response to perceived offenses: creating living sparrows from clay on the Sabbath, cursing boys who interfere with his play, striking accusers blind, and raising the dead.
- Includes instances of Jesus miraculously stretching wood, carrying water in his garment, and producing an extraordinary wheat harvest.
- Culminates in a 12-year-old Jesus astounding temple elders with his scriptural knowledge.
- **Critique of Historicity:** Newman questions the historical accuracy of these apocryphal accounts, pointing out their inconsistencies with the canonical Gospels (Luke 2:52, Luke 4:22-23, Matthew 13:53-58, Mark 6:1-6, John 2:11). He argues that these stories were likely "invented after the fact and are not real pictures of anything that happened in Jesus' ministry."
- **Apocryphal Acts (Acts of John, Paul and Thecla, Peter, Andrew, Thomas, etc.):** Aimed to "supplement the canonical acts, entertain the reader, and propagandize their own particular theological approach."
- Exhibit "strongly intuitive" tendencies, such as advocating against marriage and for extreme asceticism (e.g., only bread and water).
- Feature exaggerated and bizarre miracles presented as isolated units to glorify the apostles as miracle workers, rather than demonstrating the spread of the Gospel.

3. Post-Apostolic and Medieval Miracle Accounts (Brewer's "Dictionary of Miracles"):

- This compilation categorizes hundreds of miracle accounts under three headings:
- **Imitating Biblical Miracles:** Examples include St. Barnabas's incorruptible body and the discovery of St. Matthew's original Gospel, a dead elm blooming upon being touched by St. Zenobia's coffin, and relics joining in singing with St. Gregory of Longress.
- **Illustrating Biblical Texts:** Examples include infants miraculously praising St. Agnes ("Out of the mouths of babes"), St. Franchi producing bread from nothing ("God will provide"), and a maggot from St. Simon Stylites turning into a valuable pearl ("Holiness is better than rubies").

- **Proving Roman Catholic Dogma:** Examples include St. Anthony of Padua's mule kneeling before a consecrated wafer (transubstantiation), Cecilia Margaret's experience in purgatory, and the bodily assumption of the Virgin Mary.
- **Implications of Brewer's Miracles:** Newman highlights Brewer's analysis of how these miracles were used to support distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines, including:
 - The division of the world into God's kingdom (Catholic Church) and Satan's kingdom.
 - The merit of injuring heretics and the absence of salvation outside the Catholic Church ("There is no salvation outside the Church of Rome.").
 - The power of priests to absolve sins and the regenerative nature of baptism.
 - Transubstantiation in the Eucharist.
 - Salvation as a reward of merit and the value of asceticism and martyrdom.
 - The concepts of accumulated merit and supererogation.
 - Blind obedience to superiors.
 - The miraculous power of dead bodies, relics, and medals. ("Miracles can be performed by dead bodies, relics, and medals, as well as by living saints.")
 - The intercessory power of saints and the special status of the Virgin Mary. ("The Virgin Mary is the highest of all saints, the most powerful, the most merciful.")

4. Conclusion and Critique:

- While acknowledging the impossibility of definitively disproving all these miracle claims without a time machine, Newman emphasizes their "inconsistency...with the miracles and teachings of Scripture."
- He argues that "if they did, God was not their author," suggesting a different origin or human invention.
- Newman concurs with Brewer's assessment that the function of many of these alleged miracles was "to move the medieval church away from the teachings of Scripture."
- He further posits that these accounts may have contributed to a later rejection of Christianity during the Renaissance and beyond.

Quotes:

- **Proto-Evangelium of James:** "[Mary] is very much, shall we say, magnified in this material."
- **Critique of Apocryphal Gospels:** "My reading is that these were invented after the fact and are not real pictures of anything that happened in Jesus' ministry."
- **Purpose of Apocryphal Acts:** "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." (Quoting Hennepin)
- **Implications of Medieval Miracles:** "These miracles, if they truly occurred and were done by God, attest to the truth of distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines." (Paraphrasing Brewer)
- **Conclusion:** "Their inconsistency, however, with the miracles and teachings of Scripture makes it apparent that if they did, God was not their author."
- **Function of Medieval Miracles:** "The function of many of these alleged miracles, as Brewer points out, was to move the medieval church away from the teachings of Scripture."

Further Considerations:

- The lecture will continue in the next session to discuss the impact of these miracle accounts on the Renaissance and later periods.
- The session briefly mentions the reforms within Catholicism that have addressed some of the more extreme aspects presented in Brewer's compilation.

This briefing provides a foundational understanding of Dr. Newman's analysis of miracle accounts beyond the biblical canon, highlighting the theological and historical significance of these narratives.

4. Study Guide: Newman, Miracles, Session 2, New Testament, Apocrypha and Medieval Periods

Miracles: New Testament Apocrypha and Medieval Periods

Study Guide

I. New Testament Apocrypha

- **Definition:** Non-canonical writings from the early Christian centuries that often elaborate on or add stories to the biblical narratives.
- **Key Examples Discussed:**
Proto-Evangelium of James: Focuses on the life of Mary before the birth of Jesus, magnifying her role and detailing miraculous events surrounding her conception and early life.
Infancy Story of Thomas: Narrates numerous miraculous deeds attributed to the young Jesus (up to age 12), often involving displays of power and sometimes resulting in negative consequences for others.
- **Characteristics of Miracles in the Apocrypha:** Often more exaggerated and fantastical than biblical miracles.
- Can appear as isolated events, not necessarily connected to a larger narrative of God's redemptive work.
- Sometimes seem intended to glorify individuals (like Mary or the young Jesus) rather than primarily pointing to God's glory.
- **Authorship and Dating:** Many apocryphal texts claim apostolic authorship (e.g., James, Thomas, John), but scholarly consensus generally places their writing in the 2nd century AD or later.
- **Theological Tendencies:** Some apocryphal acts (e.g., Acts of John, Andrew, Thomas) exhibit ascetic tendencies, such as advocating against marriage and for strict diets.
- **Historicity Concerns:** The lecture raises questions about the historical plausibility of the miracles described in the apocrypha in light of the canonical Gospels (e.g., the silence of Luke about numerous childhood miracles of Jesus, the depiction of Jesus' character).

II. Post-Apostolic and Medieval Miracle Accounts (Brewer's *Dictionary of Miracles*)

- **Source:** E. Cobham Brewer's compilation of miracle accounts from ancient, medieval, and modern (up to 1884) sources, largely drawn from Roman Catholic traditions.
- **Categorization of Miracles:**
 - **Imitating Biblical Miracles:** Accounts that parallel or echo miracles found in the Bible (e.g., dead body unaffected by fire, dead elm tree blooming).
 - **Illustrating Biblical Texts:** Stories that are presented as examples or fulfillments of specific biblical verses (e.g., infants praising a saint upon her death, miraculous provision of bread).
 - **Proving Roman Catholic Dogma:** Miracles that are said to provide evidence or support for specific Roman Catholic doctrines (e.g., transubstantiation, purgatory, the role of the Virgin Mary).
- **Examples of Miracles:**
 - Appearance of St. Barnabas' ghost revealing the location of his body and the Gospel of Matthew manuscript.
 - A dead elm tree blooming upon contact with a bier.
 - Relics joining in singing with St. Gregory of Longress.
 - Various relics possessing miraculous properties (e.g., coal that burned St. Lawrence, finger of John the Baptist).
 - Mule kneeling before a consecrated wafer, demonstrating transubstantiation.
 - A deceased nun appearing to explain her time in purgatory.
 - The Virgin Mary's body being taken to heaven after her death.
- **Implications of Brewer's Miracles (According to the Lecture):** These miracles, if accepted as divine, support distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines.
 - They reinforce a view of the world divided into the Catholic Church (God's kingdom) and everything outside of it (Satan's kingdom).
 - They emphasize the merit of saints, the importance of sacraments, and the hierarchical structure of the Church.
 - They promote specific ascetic practices and a detachment from secular concerns.
 - They establish the power of relics and the intercession of saints.

- **Critique and Conclusion:** The lecture suggests that the inconsistency of these miracles with Scripture indicates that God was likely not their author. Their function appears to have been to shift the medieval church away from biblical teachings and potentially contributed to later movements away from Christianity.

III. Key Contrasts

- **Inspired vs. Non-Inspired Accounts:** The shift from the biblical accounts of miracles to those in the apocrypha and medieval sources involves moving from texts considered divinely inspired to non-inspired religious literature.
- **Purpose of Miracles:** Biblical miracles often point to God's glory and the advancement of His kingdom, while some apocryphal and medieval miracles seem more focused on entertainment, glorifying individuals, or proving specific doctrines.
- **Theological Consistency:** The theological underpinnings of the miracles differ, with the later accounts sometimes supporting beliefs that diverge from or are not explicitly found in Scripture.

Quiz

1. What is the Proto-Evangelium of James primarily about, and what was its significant influence in church history?
2. Describe two examples of miraculous events attributed to the young Jesus in the Infancy Story of Thomas that illustrate the nature of these apocryphal miracles.
3. According to the lecture, what are some of the historicity concerns raised about the miracles described in the Infancy Story of Thomas when compared to the canonical Gospels?
4. What was the primary stated purpose of the apocryphal acts (like the Acts of John and Thomas) beyond supplementing the canonical Book of Acts?
5. Brewer categorized the miracles in his *Dictionary of Miracles* under three main headings. What are these three categories?
6. Give one example of a medieval miracle account mentioned that imitates a biblical miracle and briefly describe it.
7. Provide one example of a medieval miracle account that was presented as illustrating a specific biblical text and identify the text.

8. Describe a miracle account from Brewer that was presented as proving a specific Roman Catholic dogma and identify the dogma.
9. According to the lecture's interpretation of Brewer's work, what are some of the theological implications or beliefs that these medieval miracles were used to support?
10. What is the main conclusion drawn in the lecture regarding the authorship and function of many of the miracles found in the New Testament apocrypha and Brewer's *Dictionary of Miracles*?

Answer Key

1. The Proto-Evangelium of James narrates events supposedly leading up to the birth of Jesus, heavily focusing on the life and experiences of Mary. It was very influential in the development of devotion to Mary in church history, significantly magnifying her role.
2. In the Infancy Story of Thomas, the young Jesus creates 12 clay sparrows on the Sabbath, which then fly away when he claps his hands. In another instance, Jesus curses a boy who messes up his pools of water, causing the boy to immediately wither up, demonstrating a display of power that sometimes has negative consequences.
3. The lecture questions whether the numerous childhood miracles in the Infancy Story of Thomas align with Luke's description of Jesus growing in wisdom and favor, or the lack of familiarity with such miracles among the Nazarenes in the Gospels. It also contrasts with John's statement that the miracle at Cana was the "beginning" of Jesus' signs.
4. Beyond supplementing the canonical Acts, the apocryphal acts apparently sought to entertain the reader and propagandize their own particular theological approaches, sometimes exhibiting Gnostic or ascetic tendencies.
5. Brewer categorized miracles under three major headings: those imitating biblical miracles, those illustrating biblical texts, and those proving Roman Catholic dogma.
6. One example of a medieval miracle imitating a biblical one is the account of St. Barnabas' dead body being thrown into a fierce fire after his stoning but remaining unaffected by the flames, similar to stories of figures surviving fire in the Old Testament.

7. An example of a medieval miracle illustrating a biblical text is the account of St. Agnes' death, where infants at the breast miraculously spoke to announce her death and virtues, which was linked to Psalm 8:2 ("Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have established strength").
8. A miracle account proving the dogma of transubstantiation involves St. Anthony of Padua presenting a consecrated wafer to a mule that had been starved for three days. The mule ignored oats thrown to it and instead knelt before the wafer, adoring it as its Creator and Lord.
9. The lecture suggests these miracles were used to support doctrines such as the division of the world into the Catholic Church and Satan's kingdom, the merit of saints, the necessity of Roman Catholic sacraments for salvation, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the existence of purgatory, and the special role of the Virgin Mary.
10. The lecture concludes that the inconsistency of these miracles with Scripture suggests God was likely not their author, and their function was often to move the medieval church away from biblical teachings and towards specific Roman Catholic doctrines.

Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast the nature and purpose of miracles as depicted in the canonical Gospels with those found in the New Testament Apocrypha, using specific examples from the provided text.
2. Analyze the three categories of miracles presented in Brewer's *Dictionary of Miracles*, discussing how these categories reflect the theological priorities and worldview of the medieval church as described in the lecture.
3. Evaluate the historical plausibility of the miracles described in the Infancy Story of Thomas based on the arguments presented in the lecture regarding their consistency (or inconsistency) with the canonical Gospels.
4. Discuss the potential motivations behind the creation and acceptance of the miracle accounts found in the New Testament Apocrypha and Brewer's *Dictionary of Miracles*, considering factors such as entertainment, theological agendas, and cultural context.

5. Critically assess the lecture's conclusion that the miracles found in the New Testament Apocrypha and Brewer's *Dictionary of Miracles* moved the medieval church away from the teachings of Scripture, providing specific examples to support your argument.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Apocrypha (New Testament):** Non-canonical writings from the early Christian centuries that were not included in the Bible but often feature stories and teachings related to Jesus and the apostles.
- **Canonical Gospels:** The four Gospels included in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which are considered authoritative accounts of Jesus' life and ministry.
- **Historicity:** The authenticity or factual accuracy of historical events or accounts.
- **Post-Apostolic Period:** The time period in Christian history immediately following the death of the apostles, generally considered to be from the late 1st century AD onwards.
- **Medieval Period:** The period in European history from approximately the 5th to the 15th centuries AD.
- **Relics:** Objects, typically parts of the body or personal belongings of saints, that are believed to possess spiritual power.
- **Transubstantiation:** A Roman Catholic doctrine stating that during the Eucharist, the bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ.
- **Purgatory:** In Roman Catholic theology, an intermediate state after death for purification before entering heaven for those who die in God's grace but still have temporal punishment due to sin.
- **Dogma:** A core belief or doctrine that is considered to be divinely revealed and authoritatively defined by a church or religious system.
- **Asceticism:** A practice of severe self-discipline and abstention from indulgence, often for religious reasons.

5. FAQs on Newman, Miracles, Session 2, New Testament, Apocrypha and Medieval Periods, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Post-Apostolic and Medieval Miracles

1. How do the miracle accounts in the New Testament Apocrypha, such as the Proto-Evangelium of James and the Infancy Story of Thomas, differ from the miracles described in the canonical Gospels?

The miracles in the New Testament Apocrypha often present a different picture of Jesus and his early life compared to the canonical Gospels. In the Proto-Evangelium of James, Mary is highly magnified, and the narrative focuses on miraculous events surrounding her birth and early life, including walking at six months and dancing in the temple at age three. Joseph is depicted as an older widower with children, and miraculous events attend Jesus' birth, such as the halting of the world and Salome's miraculous healing after doubting Mary's virginity.

The Infancy Story of Thomas portrays a young Jesus (ages 5-12) wielding miraculous powers in ways that seem inconsistent with the character depicted in the Gospels. These stories include Jesus creating living sparrows from clay, cursing children who displease him, and later healing those he harmed. He is also shown astounding teachers with his wisdom without formal learning. These apocryphal accounts raise questions about their historicity and whether they align with Luke's description of Jesus growing in wisdom and favor (Luke 2:52) and the lack of prior knowledge of such miracles in Nazareth (Luke 4:22-23, Matthew 13:53-58, Mark 6:1-6). The Gospel of John also presents the miracle at Cana as the "beginning of Jesus' signs" (John 2:11), further suggesting the apocryphal accounts are later inventions.

2. What are some common characteristics of the miracles found in the apocryphal acts (e.g., Acts of John, Paul and Thecla, Peter, etc.)?

The apocryphal acts, emerging from the second and third centuries, often aim to supplement the canonical Acts of the Apostles. However, their miracle stories tend to be exaggerated and fantastic, with bizarre effects. These miracles are frequently presented as isolated events, seemingly intended to glorify the apostles as miracle workers rather than demonstrating the progress of the Gospel. Additionally, some of these acts promote specific theological viewpoints, such as a strong asceticism where marriage is considered sinful and diets are restricted to bread and water, contrasting with teachings found in the canonical epistles (e.g., 1 Timothy 4:3).

3. According to Brewer's "Dictionary of Miracles," what are the three major categories into which post-apostolic and medieval miracle accounts can be divided?

E. Cobham Brewer categorizes post-apostolic and medieval miracle accounts into three main headings:

1. **Those imitating biblical miracles:** These accounts feature events that mirror miracles found in the Bible, often involving similar themes or actions.
2. **Those illustrating biblical texts:** These miracles are presented as examples or demonstrations of specific passages or concepts found in the Bible.
3. **Those proving Roman Catholic dogma:** These miracle stories are intended to provide evidence or support for distinctive doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

4. Can you provide examples of medieval miracle accounts that imitate biblical miracles, as described by Brewer?

Yes, Brewer's dictionary includes several examples of miracles imitating biblical ones:

- **St. Barnabas's body being unaffected by fire:** This echoes accounts of individuals surviving flames through divine intervention. The subsequent discovery of his body and the Gospel of Matthew manuscript resembles the discovery of significant relics.
- **A dead elm blooming at the touch of St. Zenobia's bier:** This could be seen as a parallel to instances of miraculous healing or the restoration of life, though applied to vegetation.
- **Relics joining in singing with St. Gregory of Longress:** This fantastic event evokes the idea of divine presence and the participation of holy objects in worship, reminiscent of miraculous signs accompanying divine acts.

5. How do some medieval miracle accounts illustrate biblical texts, according to the provided source?

The source gives examples of medieval miracles used to illustrate biblical texts:

- **Infants praising St. Agnes at her death, unloosening their tongues:** This is presented as an illustration of Psalm 8:2, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength."

- **St. Franchi miraculously producing bread by kneading nothing:** This is used to illustrate Matthew 6:25-33, emphasizing God's provision when one prioritizes spiritual matters.
- **A maggot from St. Simon Stylites's sores turning into a valuable pearl:** This illustrates Proverbs 3:15, "Holiness is better than rubies," by demonstrating the extraordinary value that can be associated with the relics of a holy person, even something as repulsive as a maggot.

6. What are some examples of medieval miracle accounts used to prove Roman Catholic dogma, as highlighted in the source?

Brewer's collection includes miracles intended to support specific Roman Catholic doctrines:

- **St. Anthony of Padua and the kneeling mule:** This story is presented as proof of transubstantiation, the belief that the bread and wine in the Eucharist become the actual body and blood of Christ. The mule's adoration of the consecrated wafer over oats is seen as divine confirmation of this doctrine.
- **The appearance of Cecilia Margaret from purgatory:** This account supports the doctrine of purgatory, a state of purification after death for those who die in God's grace but still have temporal punishment due to sin. Her description of being cleansed by water reminiscent of Christ's thirst on the cross reinforces this belief.
- **The Assumption of the Virgin Mary:** The narrative of St. John Damascene and Juvenal describes the apostles, except Thomas, witnessing Mary's death and funeral. Thomas's later request to see her body reveals an empty tomb, with the explanation that Mary had been taken bodily to heaven, supporting the dogma of the Assumption.

7. According to the source, what are some of the implications or teachings promoted by these post-apostolic and medieval miracle accounts, particularly in relation to the Roman Catholic Church?

The source argues that many of these alleged miracles, if believed, serve to support distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines and a specific worldview. This includes:

- The division of the world into God's kingdom (the Catholic Church) and Satan's kingdom (including non-Catholics).

- The merit of harming heretics and the lack of salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church.
- The power of priests to absolve sins and the regenerative nature of Catholic baptism.
- The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist as miraculous food.
- Salvation as a reward for merit, leading to an emphasis on saintly biographies as ideals of perfection through asceticism and self-denial.
- The importance of celibacy, blind obedience to superiors, and the suppression of natural affections.
- The idea that miracles are proof of merit and that belief in them is meritorious.
- The power of dead bodies, relics, and medals to perform miracles.
- The intercessory power of saints and the Virgin Mary, who are seen as actively involved in the lives of believers on Earth and deserving of veneration.

8. What is the overall conclusion drawn in the source regarding the historicity and origin of these post-apostolic and medieval miracles?

The source concludes that while it's impossible to definitively disprove all these miracle accounts without a time machine, their inconsistency with the miracles and teachings of Scripture suggests that if they did occur, God was not their author. The function of many of these alleged miracles, as Brewer points out, appears to have been to steer the medieval church away from scriptural teachings and promote specific Roman Catholic doctrines. Furthermore, these accounts may have contributed to a later rejection of Christianity by some during the Renaissance and beyond due to their outlandish and theologically questionable nature.