

Title: Credibility of Miracles

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Session 4

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Abstract

This lecture addresses the historical credibility of miracle reports in the book of Acts and the Gospels, challenging the Western philosophical assumption that dramatic miracles are never claimed by reliable eyewitnesses. Dr. Craig Keener critiques historical skeptics like David Hume and David Friedrich Strauss by presenting documented modern miracle accounts that occurred within living memory. He provides numerous firsthand reports and medical cases, including the instantaneous healing of blindness, organic nerve damage, the regrowth of bodily organs, and modern resuscitations from the dead. Ultimately, Keener argues that since millions of people globally claim to have witnessed or experienced miracles, historians should examine these claims objectively rather than dismissing them based on an a priori bias.

Outline

I. Introduction to Parallel Structures and Scroll Constraints

- Recapitulation of historical methods and the book of Acts as a historical monograph.
- Parallel literary structures in Luke-Acts:
 - Ancient tradition of parallel works (e.g., Plutarch's parallel biographies, Old Testament pairs like Elijah/Elisha, Moses/Joshua).
 - Key parallels between Luke's Gospel and Acts:
 - Jesus' anointing (Isaiah 61/Luke 4) paralleled with the Church's empowerment (Joel 2/Acts 2).
 - Jesus' signs (healings) repeated by Peter and Paul (e.g., healing of a paralyzed person).
 - Three trials of Jesus (two before governors, one before Herod Antipas) paralleled with three trials of Paul (two before governors, one before Herod Agrippa II).
 - Jesus' dying prayers (Luke 23:34, 23:46) paralleled with Stephen's martyr prayers (Acts 7:59-60).
- Physical constraints of scrolls:
 - Symmetry of length in ancient multi-volume works due to scroll limits.

- Scroll capacities: Matthew, Luke, and Acts were written close to the maximum standardized length of normal scrolls (approx. 32 to 35 feet long).
- Scribes and copy costs: A document like Romans (about the length of Mark) is estimated to cost around \$2,000 in current US currency for materials and professional scribal labor.
- Publication in antiquity:
 - Read aloud at dinner banquets (similar to the early house church's Lord's Supper).
 - Author revisions often occurred based on feedback received during these public readings.

II. The Apologetic and Legal Purposes of Luke-Acts

- Legal precedence in favor of early Christianity:
 - Consistent outcomes in Roman courts: Every Roman court reported in Luke-Acts declares Christians not guilty.
 - Contrast with later persecution: Written as "legal ammunition" before the era of Nero's madness and tyrannical abuse.
- Multilateral apologetic defense:
 - Defense against Roman courts, Greek philosophers, rural Asian farmers, and Jewish objections.
 - Argument for antiquity: Embedding the church's story in the ancient heritage of Israel to satisfy the Roman respect for ancient religions.
- Theological themes of growth and unstoppable mission:
 - The recurring theme of "unhindered" (akolyto) gospel expansion (e.g., Acts 8:36, 10:47, and ending in Acts 28:31).

III. Core Theological Themes in Luke-Acts

- Heavy emphasis on Prayer:
 - Numerous instances of prayer in Luke (e.g., Jesus' baptism in Luke 3:21, Luke 11, Luke 18:1, Luke 21:36, Luke 22) and Acts (e.g., Acts 1:14, 2:42, 3:1, 6:6, 8:15, 9:11, 10-12).
- Holy Spirit: Mentioned over 70 times in Luke-Acts, driving prayer, signs, and mission.
- Signs and wonders: Functions as a tool to gain attention for the gospel message.
- Inclusion of the marginalized: Focusing on the poor and sinners in Luke, and expanding to include the Gentiles in Acts.
- Spirit-empowered, cross-cultural evangelism and mission as the central emphasis of Acts.

IV. The Miracles of Acts and the Western Philosophical Problem

- Prevalence: Speeches comprise 25% of Acts, while miracle and exorcism stories account for about 20% (one-fifth) of the book.
- The Western "circular" objection to miracles:
 - A priori dismissal of ancient texts because they report miracles, based on the assumption that reliable eyewitnesses do not claim dramatic miracles.

- David Friedrich Strauss (1800s): Argued that Gospel miracle stories are myths and legends that required multiple generations to evolve.
- Rebuttal to Strauss: Strauss' own friend, Edward Morica, was medically diagnosed with a spinal walking impediment but was instantly healed during prayer with German Lutheran pastor Johann Christoph Blumhardt. Strauss dismissed it as psychosomatic to protect his theory.

V. Documented Modern Miracle Reports

- Healing of organic and nerve damage:
 - Dr. Rex Gardner's account of a nine-year-old girl with auditory nerve damage instantly healed from deafness, verified by an audiologist's tests before and after.
 - Medical study in Mozambique (Southern Medical Journal, Sept. 2010) documenting healings of blindness and deafness under prayer, backed by Candy Gunther Brown's book *Testing Prayer* (Harvard University Press, 2012).
 - Lisa Larios: Healed of degenerative bone disease during a healing service, with medical tests showing reconstructed bones that had previously degenerated.
 - Bruce Vanatta: Small intestine crushed and mostly destroyed (leaving only 25 cm of ileum). Prayed for by a visitor from New York, he felt an electric shock, and subsequent medical scans confirmed his small intestine grew from 116 cm to 275-300 cm long (an adult biological impossibility).
 - Other medical healings: Broken ankles (Carl Cockerell's 8-day radiology report), vertical heterophoria (Joy Wannifred's instant return to 20-20 vision), and rapid healing of severe burns within 30 minutes of prayer (Cuba).
- The rigor of Catholic miracle documentation: Centuries of strict, vetted medical records for reported miracles.

VI. Eyewitness Testimony as Historical Evidence

- Methodological principle: A smaller number of actual eyewitnesses carries more historical weight than a larger number of skeptical non-witnesses who were not present.
- Credible academic witnesses:
 - Dr. Wansuk Ma and Dr. Julie Ma (Oxford Center for Mission Studies): Witnessed a large goiter instantly disappear during prayer.
 - Dr. Luther O'Connor (United Theological Seminary): Witnessed a woman in the Philippines squat and bend her leg despite an unbendable metal surgical implant.
 - Danny McCain (Wesleyan minister): Witnessed his baby brother's severely scalded skin instantly heal and become pink and new during prayer.
 - Craig and Chris Keener: Personally witnessed a disabled woman named Barbara rise and walk instantly in a nursing home after prayer.
- Cured blindness:
 - Flint McLaughlin (Cambridge University): Witnessed the instant healing of a blind man with clouded eyes in Northern India.

- Dr. Bunga Shibaku Kato (President of Shalom University, Congo): Witnessed a blind woman in her 60s healed after a two-minute prayer.
- Greg Spencer: Legally blind from macular degeneration (which does not naturally reverse). Healed after prayer, and after a year of investigating his doctors, the Social Security Administration cancelled his disability benefits because his visual acuity was restored.

VII. Modern Reports of Raisings from the Dead

- Addressing the "psychosomatic" and "misdiagnosis" objections.
- Historical precedents of resuscitations (e.g., Irenaeus in the Church Fathers, John Wesley's journal entry on Dec. 25, 1742).
- Documented resuscitations in Western medical contexts:
 - Dr. Chauncey Crandall (Cardiologist, West Palm Beach): Jeff Markin flatlined for 40 minutes, fingers black with cyanosis. Crandall prayed under Holy Spirit prompting, ordered one more paddle shock, and Markin was revived with zero brain damage, subsequently converting and being baptized.
 - Dr. Sean George (Physician, Australia): Heart flatlined for 55 minutes, organs failing. Revived immediately after his wife's prayer, and returned to practicing medicine with no neurological damage.
 - Dr. Deborah Watson's sister: Fell on a concrete floor as a baby, crushing her skull; healed completely by the time they reached the doctor.
- Global reports of raising the dead:
 - Nishi tribal people (India): A government official's dying/dead son was raised after prayer to the Christian God, starting a major people movement.
 - Research by Western sociologists: Hindu village elder confirming a woman returned to life after being pronounced dead.
 - Vikram (Hindu boy in Mumbai): Drowned in a warm pool, pronounced dead by two doctors; revived after an hour and a half of Christian prayer. Vikram and his family subsequently joined the church.
 - Philippines liver cancer case (1983): Woman died in hospital, sent to morgue; revived after 1 hour and 45 minutes of prayer by a Baptist minister, her swollen abdomen and cancer completely gone. Her doctor converted.
 - Dominguez (Indonesia): Neck slit open severely, pronounced dead, revived after a vision of heaven, neck successfully sewn back.
 - Professor Ayodeji Adewuya (Nigeria/US): Son pronounced dead at birth in 1981, revived after 30 minutes of prayer; now holds a Master's degree from the University of London.
 - Timothy Olanoday (Nigerian mission leader/Anglican priest): Severely injured in a 1985 car accident, pronounced dead by police, sent to a mortuary for eight hours, woke up at 3:00 AM with no brain damage.
- Theology and Sovereignty of God:

- Not everyone prayed for is healed (e.g., Dr. Keener's male pattern baldness, glasses, and his wife's miscarriages; Dr. Crandall's son dying of leukemia; Leo's best friend not reviving).
- God remains worthy of trust regardless of the outcome of individual prayers.