

## IMAGINED LUCAN MIRACLES - IS LUKE MAKING A CONVINCING CASE FOR JESUS' MIRACLES?

Luke in a sense is the most important gospel for it is the only one that claims homework was done by the author.

It is not true that the Gospel of Luke is the one that attributes the most miracles to Jesus.

In the following stories from Luke we see no evidence that the author thought that they were miraculous.

Zechariah may have seen the angel in the Temple with the eyes of his imagination – a legitimate way to have visions according to St Teresa of Avila. He may have suspected that his wife was pregnant and so received the news that she would have a baby from his subconscious mind. His being struck dumb may have been caused by suggestion or because he would not speak.

It was possible for a woman like Elizabeth who was thought to be too old to have children and barren to have got pregnant naturally. The unexpected can happen. When Luke omitted to tell us her age he is not against a natural understanding.

Angel just means messenger so maybe the angel Gabriel who told Mary that God wanted her to be the mother of his Son was just a man. Luke does not say how Mary saw the angel so maybe he did not know. Could it have been a dream? The principle of taking the simplest interpretation says yes if Gabriel was a non-human entity. There is no evidence in the Bible that angels are not just human beings who receive orders from God. The Epistle of Jude gives us evidence that they are. The Old Testament says that Jacob fought with an angel all night.

Luke does not say that there was anything obviously miraculous in what Anna and Simeon knew about the baby Jesus (2).

At Jesus' baptism, the spirit came down upon him in visible form, in the shape of a dove (3). The dove may have been a real dove which Luke thought was possessed by the Holy Spirit. He says a voice from Heaven was heard but he does not say if he has an audible voice in mind.

The Devil in Luke could just have been a bad man who seemed to Jesus to have had the power to give Jesus a host of kingdoms. No need for a supernatural Devil in this story.

At Nazareth, Jesus walked away through the crowd who were bent on killing him by throwing him over a cliff (4). But Luke does not say why he got away so there is no need to imagine that Jesus froze the crowd in time like magic and departed.

Luke says that healings happened in Jesus' presence but does not ask us to believe that miraculous power was responsible. He does not say that the unclean spirits Jesus cast out of the allegedly possessed were real personal beings. They may be artificial personalities. Then how did the "spirits" know he was the Messiah? The people were desperate for a Messiah so insane people might have been impressed by Jesus so that they told him he was the Messiah. Jesus meant a lot of insane and gullible and silly people so he had to have been the subject of the rumour that he was the Messiah.

Did Jesus make the leprosy leave the man in Luke 5:12-16? Luke says he did but not that it was a miracle. The leprosy could have left leaving the symptoms to clear up. Perhaps the man got no worse and that was taken to mean it was gone.

Luke does not say that the paralytic walking again was a miracle (5) or that the healing of the Centurion's servant was one (7).

The catch of fish in Luke 5 need not have been supernatural for we are told that they had stopped working but not for how long until Jesus told them to try again. Jesus could have noticed fish in the water for he was sitting in the boat preaching.

Does Luke say that Jesus put demons out of a man into swine which then drowned themselves? The demons may be psychological forces. Jesus put the anger that made the man insane perhaps into the swine. He did this by enraging the swine which then charged into the lake. Luke does not say that their over-reaction was all Jesus' fault. If somebody felt possessed by a spirit that was making them very angry all the time, magicians and exorcists made animals angry which they thought meant that they were putting the person's anger into the animals and then they killed the animals to kill the anger. They thought they were putting the evil spirit into the animal.

Luke says that the breath of life went back into Jairus's daughter in Jesus' presence. It could go back into her if she were not really dead but on the edge of it. She started breathing properly again but Luke does not say she was properly dead and then resurrected. Jesus was sure she was not dead right when he said that she was only asleep and not dead.

Luke says that the apostles were half-asleep when they saw the vision of Jesus and the two prophets on the Mountain of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36). Luke does not say that if this was a real vision or an allegedly divinely inspired half-dream that we all fall into when half-asleep.

Luke attributes the cure of the epileptic boy to God but that is not the same as saying that it is a miracle (9).

In 11, Jesus casts out a Devil that made a man dumb (11). Perhaps the man wouldn't speak to anybody due to the purely mental influence of a demon. The Jews argue that the Devil is helping Jesus which he says is ridiculous. This does not prove that Jesus considered the unclean spirits he put out of people that behaved like lunatics to be real evil persons for he may not have this type of problem in mind. He may be thinking of demons that simply make bad suggestions to you.

There is no evidence that Luke considered the straightening of the cured woman in 13 to have been a miracle for she might have only imagined that she had to go about stooped. He says it was a marvel and so it was, whatever caused it.

Curing the disease is not curing the symptoms. Luke (10) says ten lepers were cured while they made their way to the priests. The one who came back must have been relieved of the symptoms but notice that Luke does not say when he came back. Luke implies that it was a while for his Jesus was a very busy man and would have been hard to see. Perhaps nature did the whole thing? Leprosy in those days meant almost any contagious skin ailment.

In Luke 16, Luke and his Jesus let it slip that miracles and resurrections of people from the dead to tell us about the dangers of dying in sin are not needed because the law and the prophets are enough. Anybody who won't believe in the law and the prophets, according to him, will only sin more if they see miracles for they will still not believe and their stubbornness will be increased. This is a hint that the Devil will inspire any miracle tales attributed to Jesus. He will manipulate lives and memories with his superior knowledge to get the lies believed.

Jesus told the blind man of Jericho, that his faith restored his sight (18). Jesus may have suspected that the blindness was caused by the man's disordered mind. No need for a miracle interpretation here.

There is no evidence that Luke viewed the two men who were loitering about Jesus' empty tomb as angels or stated that the risen Jesus was able to go from one place to another without traversing the space in between.

The ambiguous "he was taken up to Heaven" at the end of Luke is no indication that Luke thought that Jesus literally rose up to Heaven like a hot-air balloon. Mystical traditions in Judaism believed that a person who experienced Heaven had ascended to it bodily even though the body never rose off the ground.

The miracles mentioned in Luke are, the vision of angels that the shepherds saw for it told them something they could not have otherwise known, the raising of the widow's son from the dead for Luke says he was dead long enough to be really dead and says he was dead (7), and the resurrection. But these are only his interpretation.

## NON-MIRACLE ACTS

Now to Acts, Luke's sequel to the gospel. We want to check if it really is as full of accounts of magical happenings as is popularly assumed.

Acts does not say that Jesus floated away about the clouds but that he went up to Heaven in a cloud. He might have walked into a mountain mist and disappeared. The men who accosted the disciples when Jesus had gone are not said to have been supernatural angels. Many manuscripts have "he parted from them" rather than he ascended into Heaven (Earliest Christianity, G.A.Wells, Internet Infidels)..

Were the tongues of fire that appeared over the heads of the infant Church at Pentecost really supernatural? Luke does not say that they all saw them or indeed that anybody saw them. Because Jesus said that people would be baptised by the Holy Spirit and with fire then the fire of grace was burning in those people so believers did not need to see tongues of fire to believe they were there. Perhaps Luke felt that he had a revelation saying that God saw the tongues of fire. Perhaps somebody present had a hallucination. Luke would have regarded this hallucination as a work of God though not a miracle.

Luke never said a miracle was involved when the apostles spoke in many languages on Pentecost as a result of the Holy Spirit coming on them like tongues of fire.

They had been told by Jesus to preach the gospel with great urgency to all so they would have done some study in language. They didn't have a lot to say anyway.

The day the Holy Spirit came on them is said to have been the day the Church was founded and when the effects of the salvific death of Christ and the resurrection were administered. From then on the Church had the Holy Spirit. So here we have an event even more important than the death and resurrection of Jesus for they have no importance without effects. The Bible itself says that the natural man cannot take in the things of God and only redeemed people can be reliable in relation to finding out the wisdom of God. So it was because of the visit of the Spirit that we can believe in the apostles writing about Christ. So if Pentecost didn't happen then nobody can oblige us to believe in Christianity.

Neither did Luke contend that the cripple by the Beautiful Gate was healed by divine power as in miracle (3). He simply records that Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead in front of Peter but he doesn't say if God's defiance of nature struck them dead. When Peter was allowed to use God's power to kill them why wouldn't he be allowed to kill them by more mundane methods – like poisoning? Sapphira came in three hours after Ananias and when Peter told her what happened Ananias she died too. Of shock perhaps?

In Acts 5 we read that all the sick who were brought to the apostles were cured. They probably just dealt with those who were going to get better anyway.

Luke says that Stephen saw Jesus in the clouds (7). Stephen was in a highly emotional state for his cruel death was imminent and may have seen Jesus in his imagination. All Christians agree that we can have inspired visions in our imagination. If it is a present from God then every thought of God or Jesus may be regarded as a gift.

The story about Simon Magus and the charisms does not say that there could be no natural explanation for them (8). Food is a natural thing but yet Christians are able to say it is a gift of God.

Acts 8 does not say that Philip literally heard the Holy Spirit talking to him. Christians tell us to listen to the Holy Spirit speaking in our hearts which does not mean that we really hear a voice. Nor does it mean that Philip just vanished from the desert route to instantly appear at Azotus. The Spirit snatched Philip which may mean that he took over him and he didn't know what he was doing until he found himself at Azotus or maybe all it is saying is that he was urged by the Spirit so the Spirit was the reason not Philip that Philip went to that place..

Paul's vision may have been caused by overexposure to the sun (9) and his blindness could have been due to the fall from the horse. It is not said that Ananias immediately restored his sight but that "something like scales fell off his eyes and he got his sight". We are only told that the sight came back later not if it came back quickly or slowly later.

Luke omits to tell us if the vision of Cornelius and Peter's vision of the animals was or wasn't a dream (Acts 10). The information gained could have been stored in the subconscious mind and then replayed.

We are not told how Peter's chains came to be unlocked (12) or that the angel was not a mere human being carrying a light. Mary thought that Peter was the angel though she knew it was just a man which is evidence that an angel means a human person acting for God as well as a spirit that works for God.

Herod may have collapsed while he was worshipped and the death by being eaten by worms may have come later (12). Some imagine that this story tells us that worms broke out of him all at once – miraculously. Wrong! Perhaps he was already sick!

Luke does not say how Paul struck Bar Jesus blind (13) so don't read a miracle into this.

In 14, it seems that the crippled man who was cured was said to have been cured by faith. That is naturally possible.

In 16, we read that a fortune-teller ran after Paul and his friends for days while her "spirit" told everybody to listen to them for they had the true gospel. Paul got fed up and cast the spirit out. Luke did not believe that this evil spirit was a demon but a creation of the mind for a demon would not bear witness to God.

Eutychus, who had a fatal fall, had died but Paul brought him around (20). No need for a miraculous explanation here. Dead does not always mean dead for good.

In Acts 22, Paul says that his sight was instantly restored when Ananias laid his hands on him. This does not prove a miracle happened nor does Luke say Paul was certainly not mistaken.

Nowhere in Acts 28 do we read that Paul did not suffer from the deadly snakebite because of divine magic. The snake may

have just been hanging on to his skin and it may have been dark which made it look worse than it was. All who were there misjudged the seriousness of the wound when they were so baffled. They probably didn't ask. Luke does not say a miracle happened.

The only miracle in Acts is, Peter raising Dorcas from the dead (9) for he makes it clear that she was dead in the straightforward sense of the word. That is all that Luke undeniably asks us to believe to be a miracle.

## CONCLUSION

Christianity has not changed since it started. Even now with the gospels written it is still telling lies about Jesus and his powers and even using them to do it when the truth is that very few miracles are attributed to Jesus in the Bible. When he did so few when he was alive why has he done so many since? Suspicious! Suspicious!

## BOOKS CONSULTED

On Being a Christian, Hans Kung, Collins/Fount Paperbacks, Glasgow, 1978

Miracles or Magic? Andre Kole and Al Janssen, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1987

## BIBLE VERSION USED

The Amplified Bible

