

The Real Jesus
Xenos Summer Institute 2013 - Jenny Hale
Part 2 – Did Jesus Really Perform Miracles?

Overview

Part 1: Jesus: Myth or Reality?

- Jesus and his place in history
- Jesus outside of the bible: Gentile and Jewish writings
- Are the biblical biographies trustworthy?

Part 2: Did Jesus Really Perform Miracles?

- With all the copies and translations how could we know what was originally written?
- Did Jesus really perform miracles?
- Why did Jesus perform miracles?
- A reflection on the supernatural universe

Are the biblical accounts trustworthy? (Continued from Part 1)

The bible has been copied and translated so many times, how can we possibly know what was originally written?

Book	Date written	Time gap	Number of copies ^{1, 2}
Tacitus' <i>Annals</i>	116AD	1000 years	2
Josephus' <i>Jewish War</i>	70AD	950 years	9
Homer's <i>Illiad</i>	800BC	1000 years	650
New Testament	40-90AD	350 years (complete Greek copies) 30 years (fragments)	24,000 ancient copies (including 10,000 Latin Vulgate, 8,000 Ethiopic, Slavic, Arminian) 5,000 untranslated Greek copies (whole or part, 2 from 350 AD) Fragments as early as 100-200 AD Ryland's Fragment – 5 verses from John. Found in Egypt, dated AD 130

¹ Bruce, F.F, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (1981), pp.10-12

² Strobel, L, *The Case for Christ* (1998), p. 60

Other ancient documents citing the New Testament³:

- The writings of the Apostolic Fathers (AD 90 to 160) contain a wealth of allusions and quotations from the New Testament
- The writings of the heretical Gnostic School of Valentinus (mid 2nd century)

The New Testament that we have today is 99.5% true to the original writings.⁴

Did Jesus really perform miracles?

1.

Mark 1:21-31

Contrast *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*

2.

3.

Jewish tradition after the time of Jesus (Jerusalem Talmud, Babylonian Talmud, Toledoth Yeshu) was critical of Christ, but did not deny that he performed miracles. The Rabbis admitted that Jesus performed amazing wonders, but attributed his miracle working to sorcery.⁵ Celsus, an early critic of Christianity, said that Jesus picked up his miracle-working powers in Egypt.⁶ Even the Jewish historian Josephus who was not a Christian, wrote around 90 AD that Jesus did “surprising works.”⁷

³ Bruce, pp. 13-14

⁴ Strobel, p. 61

⁵ Jewish tradition portrays Jesus as a magician and a deceiver. See Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 134. From the Babylonian Talmud: “On the eve of the Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because *he has practised sorcery* and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’ But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover.” From *The Babylonian Talmud*, transl. by I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935), vol. III, Sanhedrin 43a, p. 281

⁶ Origen, *Against Celsus*, book 1, chapter 28.

⁷ Antiquities, chapter 18, paragraph 6. This is true even when you strip what are likely to be Christian additions from Josephus’ account. See Van Voorst, p. 103-104 and Bruce, p. 36-41.

4. Jesus' resurrection

What evidence for the resurrection do you find most persuasive?

Why did Jesus perform miracles?

1.

Mark 1:39-44
John 11 (see verses 4, 5, 33-35, 38)

2.

Mark 2:1-12

3.

“Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. 6 Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” – Matthew 11:4b-6

A reflection on the supernatural universe

We may firmly believe that Jesus performed miracles (including the greatest miracle of all – his own resurrection) and yet fall asleep to the reality that we continue to live in a supernatural universe - a universe where God himself intervenes to change the lives of his children in profound ways and bring glory to himself. He doesn't merely extend man's earthly life, he does something much greater. He remakes man into his own image for all to witness.

“If we are not careful, even though we say we are biblical Christians and supernaturalists, nevertheless the naturalism of our generation tends to come in upon us. It may infiltrate our thinking without our recognizing its coming, like a fog creeping in through a window opened only half an inch. As soon as this happens, Christians begin to lose the reality of their Christian lives.”⁸

Francis Schaeffer's “Two Chairs” –

⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (1981) p. 60.

Question: What are some signs that I have lost the supernatural reality of the Christian life?

“If I am trying to live a Christian life while sitting in the chair of unfaith, certain things are true. First of all it is done in the flesh. I do not care what my activity may be; I do not care how much noise I make about soul-winning evangelism, or exotic things, for example. It is still in the flesh.”

“Hudson Taylor said, ‘the Lord’s work done in the Lord’s way will never fail to have the Lord’s provision’. . . I would paraphrase his saying like this: The Lord’s work done in human energy is not the Lord’s work any longer. It is something, but it is not the Lord’s work.

“If I am trying to live a Christian life while sitting in the chair or unfaith, I am only playing at it, rather than being in it, because the real battle is not against flesh and blood, it is in the “heavenlies,” and I cannot participate in that battle in the flesh. In times of war, while the big brothers are away in the real battle, the little boys at home play soldiers. They act like soldiers all right, but they have no contact with or any influence on the real battle being fought. When I try to live a Christian life while sitting in the chair of unfaith, I am just playing at war. I am not in contact with the real battle at all.”⁹

Bibliography:

Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament History?*
F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Documents, Are they Reliable?*
Schaeffer, Francis A., *True Spirituality*
Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*
Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*
Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*
Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*

⁹ Schaeffer, p. 65.