

the resurrection of Jesus Christ, both records his appearing to the disciples and reinforces this by saying, 'After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living ...'
1 Corinthians 15:6 (NIV)

EVIDENCE IS IMPORTANT

I believe that miracles can, and do, happen today. At the time when I had been asked to write a book on miracles and science, I became closely involved with someone who had experienced a miraculous healing. In that book, listed below, I incorporated that event and developed the topic of miracles and science in much more detail than is possible in this short leaflet.



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Further information

www.cis.org.uk – Christians in Science
www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/education/people/academic/poolem.aspx - Michael's Home Page
www.faraday-institute.org - The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion

Suggested reading

Poole, M. W. (1992) *Miracles: Science, the Bible and Experience*, London: Scripture Union – now out of print but copies can be obtained through Christians in Science [£4.95].
Poole, M. W. (2007) *User's Guide to Science and Belief*, Oxford: Lion Hudson
Poole, M. W. (2009) *The 'New' Atheism: Ten Arguments that Don't Hold Water?*, Oxford: Lion Hudson

THINKING ABOUT...

miracles

Has science made miracles unbelievable?

ADDRESSING QUESTIONS OF SCIENCE AND FAITH



THINKING
ABOUT...

miracles

Michael Poole

The supreme miracle of
Jesus' power over death
is a sign that physical
death is not the end

'It was a miracle the pilot managed to land the plane safely'; 'It was a miracle she survived driving headlong into a tree'; 'It was a miracle the crane driver was late for work the morning the helicopter crashed into his cabin or he would certainly have been killed'.

We are familiar with press reports describing extraordinary events or timings as 'miracles'. The word comes from the Latin word *miraculum* for 'wonder'.

We are concerned here with the meaning of 'miracle' within the Christian tradition and a useful starting point is a verse in Acts 2:22 which contains all three words for miracle to be found in the New Testament:

'Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles [*dunamis*], wonders [*teras*] and signs [*semeion*], which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.'

The word *teras* refers to the effect of the event in generating wonder, while *dunamis* draws attention to its cause being the power of God. *Semeion* refers to its purpose as a sign. *Teras* is not applied to a miracle on its own but is often used together with *semeion*, reflecting the Bible's concern with the significance, rather than just the spectacle, of miracles.

So the stilling of a life-threatening storm (Matthew 8:23-27) is a sign of Jesus Christ's power over creation, given by his Father; while the healing miracles (e.g. of a paralytic in Mark 2:1-12 and a blind man in John 9:1-7) are signs of Christ's ability to make people whole in every way. The supreme miracle of Jesus' power over the death of individuals like Lazarus, and supremely of his own death, is a sign that physical death is not the end but that there is an eternal life. This life begins for individuals who trust the risen Christ to forgive their sins and who then start to change into his likeness.

So where does science come into all this? Well, science could never have got under way if we had not been created rational creatures and if the universe had not been created as intelligible – capable of being understood by us. Two other necessary presuppositions needed to make science possible are orderliness and uniformity. These enable people to encapsulate the nature and the working of the physical world into short, concise statements which we call scientific laws. Boyle's law, Ohm's law and the law of gravitation are typical 'laws'. Such patterns of behaviour are termed laws because they reflect the orderliness of the universe, even as the laws of the

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land underpin an orderly society. But the original choice of the term 'law' in a scientific context has caused some confusion. This is because there is one big difference between the laws of the land and scientific laws. Scientific laws are descriptive of what does (normally) happen and have been dubbed the 'customs of God'. But if God, as free agent, chooses to act differently on a particular occasion and for a special purpose as a sign, that is up to him. There is no reason for rewriting scientific laws since such unique events are not 'normal' behaviour. Scientific laws are rather like maps, which describe the way the world is but do not dictate how it must be. A miracle is not God acting where he does not normally act, but God acting differently from usual. Creation by God consists of bringing-into-being-and-

sustaining-in-being-everything-there-is, and part of this is his sovereignty in purposefully departing from his normal patterns to fulfill specific needs.

By contrast, laws of the land are prescriptive of what should happen. They are not like maps but like a doctor's prescription that tells the chemist what should go into the medicine. Laws of the land like 'Thou shalt stop at the red light' can be broken or obeyed but scientific laws cannot appropriately be said to be 'broken' or 'obeyed', only 'conformed to or not conformed to.'

But we are not supposed to be credulous by believing just anyone's claim of a miracle. Deceptions and imaginations occur. Evidence is important. That is why St Paul, referring to the unique event of



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