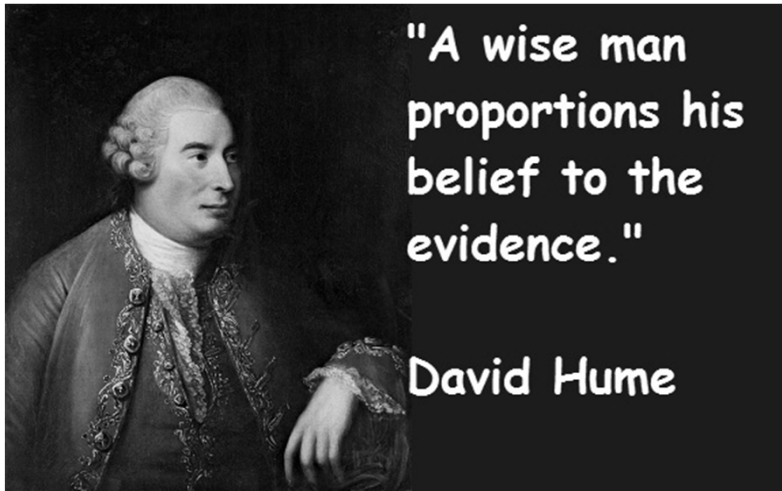


Bi 103 – The Synoptic Gospels

**UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING
BIBLICAL MIRACLES**

February 25th, 2016 Week 4


1



David Hume (18th century)


"A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence."

David Hume




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2




David Hume



"No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish."

- David Hume


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Hume's 4 principles . . .

1. No miracle has ever been attested by a sufficient number of educated and rational witnesses to be proven true.
2. There is a human tendency to believe the spectacular, things that cause wonder and surprise
3. Most reports of miracles occur among ignorant and barbarous people
4. Claims of miracles occur in all religious traditions, thus nullifying one another.


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Hume's 4 principles . . .

1. No miracle has ever been attested by a sufficient number of educated and rational witnesses to be proven true.
#1 and #3 are simply false
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Hume's 4 principles . . .

1. No miracle has ever been attested by a sufficient number of educated and rational witnesses to be proven true.
#1 and #3 are simply false
2. There is a human tendency to believe the spectacular, things that cause wonder and surprise
#2 expresses a truth, BUT this does not preclude the truth of Miracles
3. Most reports of miracles occur among ignorant and barbarous people
4. Claims of miracles occur in all religious traditions, thus nullifying one another.

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Hume's 4 principles ...

1. No miracle has ever been attested by a sufficient number of educated and rational witnesses to be proven true.
#1 and #3 are simply false
2. There is a human tendency to believe the spectacular, things that cause wonder and surprise.
#2 expresses a truth, BUT this does not preclude the truth of Miracles
3. Most reports of miracles occur among ignorant and barbarous people
4. *#4 the Bible claims multiple sources for claims of miracles occur in all religious traditions, thus falsifying one another. and does not claim that any other reported miracles are true.*

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ALTHOUGH MIRACLES CAN NOT BE ATTESTED TO BY SCIENTIFIC MEANS THEY CAN BE STUDIED USING HISTORICAL METHODS.

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- The Historians role is to find out what happened, not to assume what could or could not occur.
- Which is historically more objective:
 - To assume miracles cannot occur,
 - Or to keep an open but cautious perspective?

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Raymond Brown (1928–1998)

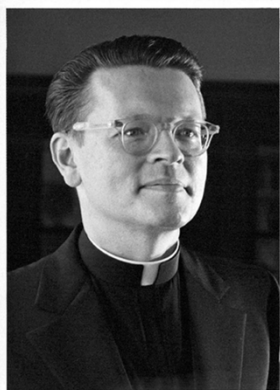
- Raymond states,

Historicity . . . Should be determined not by what we think possible or likely, but by the antiquity and reliability of the evidence . . .

As far as we can trace, Jesus was known and remembered as one who had extraordinary powers.

To determine the historicity of a miracle, we must ask questions like, Is the event contextually plausible?

What circumstances might have prompted the creation of such a story. Who witnessed the event? Were these reliable and credible witnesses? How was the event recorded and passed down to later generations?



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Did Jesus Perform Miracles?

- Nearly universal agreement exists today that Jesus was viewed by his contemporaries as a healer and an exorcist. The gospel traditions were filled with these accounts.
- Miracles occur in all strata of the gospel sources including Mark, Q, M, L, and John.
- Miracles also in a variety of gospel genres including miracle stories, sayings, parables, commissioning accounts, passion narratives, and summaries of Jesus' activities.

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- Josephus states that Jesus was a doer of startling deeds a probable mention of his miracles.
- The Bab. Talmud stated Jesus was executed because he practiced "MAGIC" and lead Israel astray. While this is meant as a statement against Christians it does admit to the reliable tradition that Jesus performed supernatural deeds.
- While these things do not prove he performed miracles it confirms he was widely acclaimed as a miracle worker even among his enemies.

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- The question of whether Jesus performed specific miracles must be judged on a case by case basis but,
 - If we posit that miracles are impossible then there is little we can say
 - But, if you posit
 - that miracles are possible
 - That Jesus was an exceptional man, viewed by his contemporaries as a worker of miracles.
- Then it is reasonable to assume that the Miracles took place, and that Jesus was in deed a Miracle Worker.

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Ancient Parallels to Jesus Miracles

- First Century Magic . . .
But always included Spells and Rituals to get God to act vs Jesus who acted in his own authority.
- Hellenistic Divine Men . . .
There are many similarities to Gospel accounts but more differences and these were written long after their practitioners, and longer after Jesus.
- Jewish Charismatic Rabbis . . .
Rabbis always praying to God, and waiting rather than acting on their own authority. These were also written 3-4 centuries after Jesus.

The significance of Jesus' miracles lies in the power and the presence of the Kingdom.

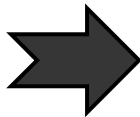
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The Power and Presence of Miracles

- I would like each of you to look up the following 4 texts, and identify a “high level theme or classification for each text”:
 - Mk 7: 24-30
 - Mt 9:2-8
 - Mk 5:21-24, 35b-41
 - Mt 8:23-27



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Conclusion

- The question of Jesus’ miracles is
 1. A philosophical question
 2. A historical question.
- If miracles are not ruled out a priori, then they do well under close examination being widely attested to in multiple sources, and forms, are coherent and most certainly authentic preaching of Jesus.

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- They (the miracles) are a manifestation of the in-breaking power of the kingdom of God, coming to fulfillment through Jesus the Messiah.

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Exegeting a Miracle Account

A. The Genre “miracle Story”

1. Definition, a narrative focusing on a miracle as it's main feature
2. Usual Features of this Genre (besides narrative)
 - a. The Problem is narrated
 - b. A request for help
 - c. Actions of the miracle worker
 - d. Result
 - i. healing, deliverance, etc
 - ii. Response of demon
 - iii. Response of spectators etc
3. Functions of Miracle Accounts in the Gospels
 - a. Person of Jesus seen through his acts (Jn 5:36)
 - b. Redemptive activity of God

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Miracles in the Gospels

Jesus changed water into wine (John 2:1-11).
 Jesus cured the nobleman's son (John 4:46-47).
 The great haul of fishes (Luke 5:1-11).
 Jesus cast out an unclean spirit (Mark 1:23-28).
 Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Mark 1:30-31).

Jesus healed a leper (Mark 1:40-45).
 Jesus healed the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13).
 Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead (Luke 7:11-18).
 Jesus stilled the storm (Matthew 8:23-27).
 Jesus cured two demoniacs (Matthew 8:28-34).
 Jesus cured the paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8).
 Jesus raised the ruler's daughter from the dead (Matthew 9:18-26).

Jesus cured a woman of an issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48).

Jesus opened the eyes of two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31).
 Jesus loosened the tongue of a man who could not speak (Matthew 9:32-33).

Jesus healed an invalid man at the pool called Bethesda (John 5:1-9).

Jesus restored a withered hand (Matthew 12:10-13).

Jesus cured a demon-possessed man (Matthew 12:22).

Jesus fed at least five thousand people (Matthew 14:15-21).

Jesus healed a woman of Canaan (Matthew 15:22-28).

Jesus cured a deaf and mute man (Mark 7:31-37).

Jesus fed at least four thousand people (Matthew 15:32-39).

Jesus opened the eyes of a blind man (Mark 8:22-26).

Jesus cured a boy who was plagued by a demon (Matthew 17:14-21).

Jesus opened the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:1-38).

Jesus cured a woman who had been afflicted eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17).

Jesus cured a man of dropsy (Luke 14:1-4).

Jesus cleansed ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19).

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-46).

Jesus opened the eyes of two blind men (Matthew 20:30-34).

Jesus caused the fig tree to wither (Matthew 21:18-22).

Jesus restored the ear of the high priest's servant (Luke 22:50-51).

Jesus rose from the dead (Luke 24:5-6).

The second great haul of fishes (John 21:1-14).

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