MIRACLES: WHO CAN DO THEM?

By Duane Laflin

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(Thank you Scott!)

All Scripture references from the King James Version of the Bible
“For with God nothing shall be impossible.”

Luke 1:37
TO FELLOW CHRISTIAN ILLUSIONISTS

As Christian illusionists we have an obligation to make it clear to our audiences that our work is not supernatural. God does miracles. We do not. Our specialty is tricks, sleight of hand maneuvers, and mysterious effects. We cannot do anything that natural law does not allow us to do. It is God who specializes in doing that which is otherwise impossible.

Another obligation we have is that of pointing out truth about deceptions relating to the supernatural. As magicians we have experience and knowledge that allow us to identify the tricks of the so called “psychics.” We know what fortune tellers, mystics, and spiritualists actually do. We can point out the false nature of their works and should do so at every opportunity.

Because we do get involved in debunking the claims of those who pretend to have miraculous power when actually they do not, we need to have a firm understanding of what the Bible says about who can and who cannot do miracles.

With this in mind, I share the following study of Scripture.
“Ah Lord God, behold thou hast made heaven and the earth by Thy great power and stretched out arm...there is nothing too hard for thee”

Jeremiah 32:17
INTRODUCTION: WHO CAN DO MIRACLES?

Psalm 136:4 declares, “To Him, who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth forever.”
This grand text is declaring that God is the only one in the universe who can do wonders and miracles alone. It is reminding us that He does not require any help with His amazing work. He is unique in His omnipotence. He is matchless and unparalleled in His power.

The text is also calling us to an attitude of worship in light of the truth that this all-powerful God, who can operate without limit or constraint, is touched by the needs and concerns of human beings. The phrase “for His mercy endureth forever” means He never stops caring about the condition of humanity.

Isn’t it wonderful to know that the one who has power beyond comparison or measure is also the one who has ultimate love for us! This is cause for thankfulness and high praise.

Some have suggested that this text is also teaching that no one but God can do wonders. They point to the phrase “who alone doeth wonders” as proof of this assertion. Their intention, which is good, is that God is further glorified by the message that no one but He can do miraculous things.

In this, even if the intention is good, if the interpretation of the text is not correct, harm is done. So we must ask the following question.

Is it true that God is the only one who can do miracles?
The answer is no. Such is not the meaning of the text. The Hebrew term translated “alone” in Psalm 136:4 is a word that is used over 100 times in the Old Testament with a variety of connotations. It usually underscores the idea of isolation. This connotation means it does not focus on something being unlike anything else or the only one of its kind. It rather conveys the concept of something being by itself or singular in the situation.

Psalm 136:4 is telling us that God operates by Himself. He needs no assistance or accompaniment when performing His wonders. There is no one else who can take credit for what He does. He can do his miracles alone.

The same Hebrew word which is translated “alone” in Psalm 136:4 first appears in the Bible in Genesis 2:18 where God said that “it is not good that man should live alone,” Adam was by himself. God saw a need to change that situation.

So when it comes to the performance of miracles we can say that God is by Himself. He does not have or need any kind of helper. When others do miracles they cannot operate by themselves. They do not function alone. They can only work because God grants them the ability and opportunity to do so.

God is alone in the universe as the one who can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants, and however He wants. God is the only who can do miracles alone, but God is not the only one who can do miracles.

To understand this matter better there are three truths that must be considered:

I. God Is Not The Only Supernatural Being In The
Universe.

II. God Has Enabled Some Humans To Accomplish Miracles.

III. Satan Can Do Miraculous Things.
God is alone in the universe as the one who can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants, and however He wants. God is the only who can do miracles alone, but God is not the only one who can do miracles.
I. GOD IS NOT THE ONLY SUPERNATURAL BEING IN THE UNIVERSE.

God is alone and beyond compare in His identity, but there are other beings in heavenly places. Satan is real. Demons are real. Angels are real. They exist because God created them. In reference to the wickedness of Satan and His angels, God did not create it. To these creatures, just as He did with human beings, He imparted the privilege of free will. Like human beings who chose the way of sin and became sinful, so Satan and His angels chose the way of evil and became evil. God did not create their corrupt natures, but He did create the beings that now have corrupt natures.

They are supernatural beings and therefore have supernatural abilities. When Satan tempted Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, he came in the form of a serpent and communicated to them through the Serpent. Can a man do this? Can a man enter into a snake and send messages thereby? The answer is no.

Therefore, in the least, we must draw the conclusion that what Satan accomplished through the incident in the garden was other than natural. If we don’t want to call it a miracle, at the minimum we must admit that, since it was more than natural, it could be called supernatural.

Satan, demons, and angels know things that humans do not know and have the ability to do things that humans cannot do. An angel rolled the heavy stone away from the tomb of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:2, Mark 16:3-4). An angel entered a locked prison and released Peter who was bound in chains (Acts 12:7-11). Demons inhabited a man and then left him to enter into pigs which
then ran into the sea (Mark 5:1-14). An evil spirit dwelled within a man, spoke through him, and even moved him to violence (Acts 19:14-16).

A miracle can be defined as an “interference with nature by supernatural power” (C.S. Lewis). Prison bars inexplicably opening, locked chains falling away from a man’s wrists, a massive stone being rolled away from a grave without the use of natural means, demonic personalities expressing themselves through the mouth of a human being, would definitely fit this definition.

The only way to deny that there are beings besides God who can do supernatural things would be to deny the reality of angels and demons. To deny these would be to deny the direct teaching of Scripture.
II. GOD HAS ENABLED SOME HUMANS TO ACCOMPLISH MIRACLES.

In II Kings 6:1-7 an amazing story is told about the prophet Elisha. While cutting wood, the iron head from a man’s axe flew off the handle and into the water. The man was greatly distressed by this event because the axe wasn’t his. He had borrowed it from someone else and needed to be able to return it. He was in a predicament because not only had the axe head fallen off, it had gone into the river where it could not be recovered.

Elisha asked him to point out where it went into the water. The prophet then went to this location at the river’s edge, tossed a stick into the water, and the iron axe head floated to the surface. The words of Scripture are “the iron did float.” The man retrieved it from the water’s surface. It was a miracle!

In the text that tells that story, nothing is said about God causing the iron to float. As believers we know that Elisha could not have accomplished such an amazing thing alone. We know that it was only because God was with him that a wonder like this was possible. Nevertheless, the biblical text presents it as an act of Elisha. Moreover, it is clear that the people of his time viewed him to be a man of miracles because of this and other equally astonishing events in his life (II Kings 5:4...“the prophet in Israel who can heal“).

In the eyes of those who today read and believe the biblical accounts of the ministry of Elisha, there will also be the view that he was a man of miracles.

We must consider Samson as well. Were not his accomplishments more than natural? Surely we would
not say it was just amazing physical strength that carried away the gates of the city or killed one thousand men with the jawbone of a mule! What he did would have to be termed as supernatural. We know God gave him the power to do these things, but we also must see that the Scripture, in describing his mighty acts, does not say, “God carried the gates of the city,” or, “God pushed down the pillars of the temple”; it tells us Samson did these things. The direct conclusion would be that Samson had miraculous strength. God gave it to him, but it was still his to use.

In the New Testament, we find direct references to men doing wondrous things. Acts 2:43 says, “...and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.” What is the language of Scripture saying? It is telling us that God’s servants were able to do things that were miraculous. Acts 5:12 says, “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.” How were these things done? The Bible says it was by the hands of the apostles. Acts 6:8 says, “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.”

Surely the apostles and Stephen gave God the glory for what was happening and they certainly knew that the amazing things which transpired occurred only because God was working through them. Even so, rather than calling our attention to this, the words of Scripture speak of the men themselves as doing these wondrous things.

In I Corinthians 12:10 and 12:28 Paul spoke of Christians possessing the spiritual gift of miracles. In 12:29 he asks the question, “Are all workers of miracles?” which assumes that although many did not do
miracles, some did.

The New Testament indicates that not only did believers have supernatural power, a demon-possessed man had it too. In Mark chapter 5, there is an account of a man who could not be controlled because he was possessed with an unclean spirit. He was able to break any chains that were used in an attempt to bind him (Mark 5:4). This ability to break chains was not normal. It was not something a man with natural strength could do. In spite of strongmen feats at sideshows and at the circus, apart from carefully controlled circumstance with chains that are designed to particular specifications, a man cannot break metal bonds. No strongman can break every kind of chain put upon him. The text in Mark says the man with the unclean spirit broke the chains put on him and he also broke the fetters. This strength was present in him because of the demonic horde that was also within him (Mark 5:9).

Yet another New Testament text to consider is Matthew 10:8 where Jesus Christ sent out his disciples with the instruction, “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.” It is incredible to note that He actually told them to “raise the dead.” Would He commission them to do something that they could not do? Luke 10:19 tells us Jesus said to these same disciples, “Behold I give unto you power…” Jesus Christ imparted to His disciples power and authority to accomplish the task He gave them.

Apparently the disciples experienced a least some success in following the Lord’s instruction for in Matthew 17 we find them mystified by a situation where they could not cast out a specific demon (Matthew 17:19). Their
attitude suggests that they had been able to cast out other demons and so were surprised that they could not deal with this one.

Then too, in Luke 10:17, we are told of the disciples returning from the mission upon which they had been sent (the mission that began with the instruction about healing, delivering, and even raising the dead). Their words were these; “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.”

It must again be stated that they realized that the power which was working to accomplish these amazing things was the power of God. Even so, it seems God had granted them the privilege of exercising this power through the name of Jesus Christ.

This example bears out our initial conclusion that God, who uniquely has miraculous power and completely governs its use, does give some others the ability and opportunity to do things that would otherwise be impossible. The God who controls miracle power has allowed others to use it.

Note: Christian illusionists who read this book will already know that they themselves do not do miracles.

It is vital for readers who are not illusionists to know this as well. An illusionist only does tricks. His special effects are purely the result of physical practice, study, clever apparatus, and theatrical presentation.
III. SATAN CAN DO MIRACULOUS THINGS.

Revelation 13:14 states, “…and deceiveth them that dwell in the earth by the means of the miracles which he had the power to do in the sight of the beast.” Revelation 16:14 says, “…for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth.” Revelation 19:20 says, “…and the beast was taken, and the false prophet that wrought miracles before him.”

The popular and trusted Bible teacher Dr. M.R. DeHaan once said, “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.” By this he was urging Christians to, as much as possible, take Scripture at face value. This approach is better than trying to read hidden meanings or strange interpretations into it. It is generally true that Scripture means exactly what it appears to mean.

The above texts from Revelation all clearly say that the spirits of devils could work miracles. Why should we not believe this?

II Thessalonians 2:9, speaking of the coming anti-Christ, says, “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders.” Some have suggested that, since the wonders are actually lying wonders, they are not wonders at all. In other words they are false or pretend wonders. This is not an accurate interpretation. In the same verse we find it stated that they work with power and signs. The natural progression of the text is that they have power to do signs and wonders and are using the signs and wonders to spread lies. The wonders are used for a wicked purpose, but they still are wonders.
It is vital to keep in mind that the power of Satan and demonic beings is restricted. In spite of the fact that in comparison to humans they have supernatural ability, they still are limited by God as to what they can and cannot do. They are not free to interfere with human life and the laws of nature in any way they choose. In fact, it seems they are only allowed to use their strength in specific situations.

The book of Job gives us insight about this. Satan couldn’t touch Job unless God allowed it. He could not interfere with Job’s commerce or bring about disasters just because he wanted to do such a thing. Every action of Satan was governed by God’s permission. (Job 1:9-11, 2:4-7.) When Satan destroyed Job’s possessions (Job 1:12) and afflicted Job’s body (Job 2:7), it was because God granted him this action.

Satan can do miraculous things, but he cannot do them unless God permits.
THREE CONCLUSIONS

#1. In light of the fact that there are supernatural beings besides God, and the fact that God has allowed some humans to do miracles, and the fact that Satan can perform some miraculous and wondrous actions, we cannot say that God is the only one who can do miracles.

In light of the fact that all of these beings can only do what they do because God has made them what they are and allows their specific abilities to be used, we can say that God is unique and alone in the nature of His power. Unlike all others, there is nothing that confines Him and He alone knows no boundaries. God faces no threats or challenges. He operates freely. As Moses was told in Exodus 3:14, God is the “I AM THAT I AM.”

Satan and his demons are supernatural and therefore extremely powerful, yet they are not able to do whatever they please. They cannot freely interfere with the affairs of this world. They are always subject to God’s rule. They have never gained and will never gain any kind of victory over God. Nor will sinful men ever thwart God’s purpose or keep Him from fulfilling His promise. We who rejoice in the power of God have no need to worry about the power of the enemy.

#2. Satan is not God. He is not omnipotent. He is not everywhere. He does not know everything. We must not make the mistake of glorifying him by attributing to him abilities that he does not possess.

We would be wise to credit Satan only with doing that which the Bible specifically tells us He can do. We also would be wise to remember that even if God did allow Satan to do something on a particular occasion in
history, this fact does not mean that Satan can do the same thing all the time. What happened to Job was unique. Scripture never indicates that it is a common thing. We must not assume that, since Satan afflicted Job, he also afflicts us in the same manner. The fact that demons will perform lying wonders in the end times, as predicted in the book of Revelation, does not mean that demons are doing lying wonders every day in the present.

Does the Bible say that Satan empowers people to read minds, tell fortunes, cause curses to come to pass, or defy the laws of nature? No! Therefore, even though we believe Satan exists and has supernatural abilities, we must not claim that he is involved in such things. We must not say that soothsayers, psychic healers, and those who claim to be witches or warlocks have Satanic powers when they do not. The fact that Satan is real does not mean that voodoo and sorcery is real.

We must not foolishly draw conclusions about the devil on the basis of interpretations of circumstance or stories that we hear people tell.

Does the Bible say that Satan can control the weather, make us fat, keep a car from starting, or possess an artifact and therefore bring adversity into a home? No. Then we must not claim that such things happen.

Does the Bible say that Satan is free to speak through dead people, make things levitate, or give lifelike power to that which is inanimate? No. Therefore we must not allow ourselves to believe that Satan does such things.

Finally, does the Bible say that Satan is constantly doing a work of deception? Yes. Does the Bible teach
that the devil is behind the spread of much false doctrine? Yes. Therefore, we should view him as mainly in the business of bringing confusion about God’s truth. His great desire is to keep people from knowing the way of salvation and to keep them from turning to the life-changing power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#3. Christians must have respect for Satan’s power. They must also have great respect for his ability to deceive and thereby keep humans from knowing and glorifying the true and living God (Ephesians 6:10-18). However, they must not glorify him by believing that Satan is free and able to do whatever he chooses.

Christians must be careful to give God His due glory by keeping in mind His complete control over every aspect of creation. They must worship Him as the one who alone is uniquely free and able to do all that He chooses. They should continually rejoice in the fact that “greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4).
“We will be wise to only credit Satan with doing that which the Bible specifically tells us He can do.”
FINAL CONCERN

I hope that readers have given proper attention to the full explanation and logic provided on these pages. If this booklet is only skimmed, wrong conclusions may be reached. Please give extra attention to the final *Three Conclusions*.

PERSONAL COMMENT ABOUT MY WORK AS AN ILLUSIONIST

As a Christian Illusionist my desire is to help people understand the difference between illusion and truth. I use my skills to remind them that the only sure way to know truth about life and eternity is through the Word of God and a living relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am comfortable using illusions in ministry because they are part of God’s creation. (I Timothy 6:17 “…God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”) The mirage of water being on a highway when it really is not there is not caused by evil or by demons. It is there because God created light to have reflective properties that make such a thing happen. The fact that the insect known as the praying mantis looks like a stick rather than a bug, and the fact that a chameleon can blend into his surroundings so it appears he is not there, are illusions that exist because God put such things into this world. The fact that when human eyes look at railroad tracks from a distance they tend to see the tracks as coming together when they do not, is another phenomenon that exists because of how God made things to work. God is
the author of many natural illusions.

If God is the author of physical illusions, and He is, how can we say it is wrong for a man to use them as well? Illusions that happen because of principles and realities that are part of the created world are not good or evil. Like other things in the created world, they are simply tools that can be used for good or evil, depending on the motives and actions of those who use them.

I use physical abilities, laws of science and physics, principles of psychology, and good old-fashioned acting skills to make things happen that surprise and mystify. Such are effective tools in gaining the attention of people for the purpose of illustrating and conveying spiritual truth.

The Bible contains many examples of unique events and memorable actions being used as teaching tools. Our Lord Himself did much teaching with parables. The parables were often based on things listeners could see happening nearby. The use of wonderful visual aids is a ministry technique solidly evidenced in Scripture.

When I do use illusions in ministry, I am careful to ensure that audiences know the nature of what is happening. I do not deceive them by letting them think I have some kind of supernatural power. To the contrary, I openly tell them, “I believe in miracles, but I do not do them. God does miracles. I employ techniques from His creation to help us think about things God wants us to know.”

Even when I am not using illusions in public ministry, I continually find delight in the amazing and wonderful things God has put into this world. He truly is a God of wonders!
ABOUT DUANE LAFLIN

Over the course of more than thirty years, Duane and his wife Mary have ministered as Christian Illusionists. They have traveled full-time in this work for twenty years. Their performances have been seen on five continents, in many countries of the world, and in forty-seven of the fifty states in the USA.

Along with live appearances, Duane has worked to create tools and teaching materials that help others who are involved in creative ministry. He is the author of many books and video teaching programs. He was the president of the International Fellowship Of Christian Magicians from 1991-1995.

On the secular level, Duane has received many high honors and special awards. He has been granted status as a member of the Inner Magic Circle with Gold Star by the international Magic Circle, which is headquartered in London, England. Conventions of illusionists often bring him in as a guest performer and lecturer. He has lectured at the Magic Castle in Hollywood, California, on three different occasions and was a guest instructor at the Siegfried and Roy College of Magic in Capetown, South Africa.

Duane and Mary Laflin presently perform full-time at Magic Beyond Belief Theater in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, doing a large-scale magic show with tigers and grand illusions. In each performance they take time to share their faith that God is the one who does true miracles.

The Laflins are faithful to their local church and enjoy doing as many ministry events as time allows.
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