

## Summary of Miracles, Chapters 6-10

### Chapter 6 – Answers to Misgivings

In this chapter, like a good salesman or debater, Lewis is trying to counter arguments that are raised to question his contention that the Supernatural exists.

Before diving in, notice on page 62 that Lewis talks about the rational and moral element in each human mind is a point of force from the Supernatural working its way into Nature. Given his definition of a miracle (an interference with Nature by a supernatural power), that would seem to make reason and morality miracles. Lewis says as much on page 68.

- **Misgiving One:** Rational thinking is affected by the state of the brain. True, Lewis says. Alcohol, a blow on the head, the decline of the brain as we age all affect our ability to reason. But so what? That fact in no way counters Lewis's notion that reason originated from outside the brain, not inside it. Similarly, just because some communities are more or less inclined to be moral by their history, economics, geography, etc., does nothing to counter the notion that morality and conscience originated outside Nature.
- **Misgiving Two:** If the Supernatural truly existed, we wouldn't be arguing about it. We'd all see the evidence. Lewis says that just as we don't notice the glass in a window when we look outdoors, don't notice our eyes when we read, don't notice the grammatical structure of our language, so we don't notice the Supernatural, even though it's there. Second, the Naturalists think about Nature, but they forget that they're thinking. If you think about thinking, it becomes obvious that it's not a natural event and must come from somewhere else.

Lewis bemoans in this chapter that, with the loss of authority and tradition upholding revelation and philosophy, every day people are on their own to work out these issues for themselves. Unfortunately, most don't have the training and skills to do. A great quote: "A society where the simple many obey the few seers can live; a society where all were seers could live even more fully. But a society where the mass is still simple and the seers are no longer attended to can achieve only superficiality, baseness, ugliness, and in the end extinction."

### Chapter Seven – A Chapter of Red Herrings

A **red herring** is a clue or statement intended to mislead or distract from the actual issue. Lewis takes on several in this chapter.

He opens by saying that the case against miracles can be argued from two different grounds. Either the character of God excludes them, or the character of Nature excludes them. Lewis tackles the second first.

- **Red Herring One:** We know a miracle is contrary to the laws of Nature. People in ancient times could believe in them because they didn't know the laws of Nature, but we now know they're scientifically impossible. Bunk, Lewis says. Joseph, for example, knew that the laws of Nature said that, for her to be pregnant, she had to have had sex with a man. He finally accepted Mary's pregnancy as a miracle.

Nothing is surprising, or exceptional, or extraordinary until you first know what the ordinary is. So the ancients understood laws of Nature. We might understand more, but they understood perfectly well.

- Red Herring Two: The ancients thought the Earth was the largest thing in the Universe, and so it was reasonable to suppose that the Creator was especially interested in Earth and man. Now that we know how small and insignificant we are, it makes no sense to think that God has a special interest in us. First, astronomers like Ptolemy knew full well just how comparatively small the Earth is.

In truth, Christianity has always discussed our smallness and the terror it can bring. And we don't believe that all things were made for humanity. We do believe, however, that God loves man and became man to rescue us. How does the size of the universe affect the credibility of this doctrine one way or the other? Some people say that anything as small as Earth must be too small to merit the love of the Creator. Christianity says we don't merit it. Christ died because God is love, and He loves infinitely. The size of a world says nothing about its importance.

### **Chapter Eight – Miracles and the Laws of Nature**

Is Nature such that supernatural interferences with her are impossible? That's the question Lewis addresses in this chapter.

- She is, in general, regular and behaves according to fixed laws. If you grant the existence of a Power outside Nature, is it absurd to think that it might sometimes intervene?
- There are three conceptions about the Laws of Nature. The first: they are brute facts with no rhyme or reason. Nature might do one thing one day and another the next. The second: they are applications of the law of averages. Individual acts are random, but we deal with such enormous numbers that they average out and can be calculated practically. The third: The Laws of Nature are as rigid as the laws of math. What happens once will always happen (as long as there's no interference).
- The first conception allows for miracles because it can't be told what's normal and what's not. The second also allows for miracles; the averages can be beaten if an outside force intervenes. The third also allows for miracles; it can't rule out the possibility of an interference.
- Miracle, from the point of view of the scientist, is doctoring, tampering or cheating.
- The Laws of Nature don't really cause events to happen. They only state the pattern to which every event must conform.
- Miracles don't break the Laws of Nature; they constitute an interference but not a total unraveling. Mary's pregnancy and Jesus' birth followed the Laws of Nature after the miraculous conception occurred. Miraculous wine will still intoxicate. A miracle's cause is the activity of God; its results follow according to Natural Law.
- Miracles don't contradict the Laws of Nature, but Nature, left to her own resources, could never produce them.

### **Chapter Nine – A Chapter Not Strictly Necessary**

- For a Naturalist, "Nature" is only a word for "everything," and it's hard to say or feel anything very interesting about "everything."

- It becomes different when you think of Nature as a creature. It is not in Nature that you have to find all the answers; it's in Something far beyond that all contrasts are explained.
- It then is no more baffling that Nature is both fair and cruel than it is that someone you meet on a train might be a dishonest grocer and a kind husband. Nature is not the Absolute; she's a creature, with good points and bad points.
- No smallest part of Nature is there except because it expresses the character God chose to give her.
- To treat Nature as God is to lose the whole substance and pleasure of her.
- The scientists say she will run down and die, but the theologians say she is to be redeemed.

### **Chapter Ten – “Horrid Red Things”**

- Some people say the Supernatural would never invade the Natural, so they reject especially Christianity because it is the story of a great Miracle, the Incarnation.
- Some people see it as primitive to say God had a Son that came down from Heaven and descended into Hell, and then ascended and sat at His Father's right hand. Lewis was taught by a man holding such views; he came to see them as a misunderstanding.
- We often are forced to use metaphors to explain things that cannot be perceived by the senses.
- Three principles: Thought is distinct from the imagination that accompanies it. Thought can be mainly sound even when false images are mistaken by the thinker for true ones. Anyone who talks about things that can't be experienced with the senses must inevitably talk as if they could.
- Man is the highest of things we meet in our experience – art, science, exploration. It's not unreasonable to suppose that we are less unlike God than anything else we know.
- Absurdity of images does not imply absurdity of the doctrines. What matters most is that a man in Palestine survived death and now operates as the supreme agent of the supernatural Being who governs and maintains reality.
- Christianity decides quite clearly that naïve images are false.
- Early Christians talked about Christ both simply and profoundly, as the Son and as the Word who was with God from eternity.
- Primitive man might not have been able to conceive of pure spirit, but also couldn't conceive of mere matter.
- Christian doctrines – even Jewish doctrines – have always been statements about spiritual reality, not specimens of primitive physical science.
- The accounts of the miracles in first-century Palestine are either lies, or legends, or history. And if the most important are lies or legends, then the claim that Christianity has been making for the past 2,000 years is false.