

Added notes on the former prophets

1. The concept of miracle and myth and legend.

The miracle is usually seen as something happening beyond the bounds of established laws and principles..whether scientific, theological, sociologic, etc. Miracle is often denied by naturalistic thinking simply on the bounds that it is assumed we have a grip on all such laws as noted above. Logically miracles may be ordered after laws of a higher nature with which we are not sufficiently familiar but the evidence of which is seen in many areas of life. Miracles should posit not limit to belief unless total intelligence is assumed. In the Scripture there are a few "miracle ages"...the time of Moses through Joshua, the days of Elijah and Elisha, and the economy of the early New Testament age. It does not mean miracles do not happen at other times but these were periods where they were more the rule than the exception.

In this corner we do not explain miracles, we accept them. We do note that in anything miraculous there may be a number of elements: one of time, condition, circumstance, etc. For example Schultz in THE OLD TESTAMENT SPEAKS (p. 94) notes occasions of the drying of the Jordan river in known times. In 1266 the river was dry for ten hours following an up-river landslide and in 1927 dry for 21 hours following a west bank collapse. We do not think this is what happened in Joshua's day...the text would seem to be contrary to this...but if it had...then the event was natural but the timing supernatural. Joshua could have known nothing about the occurrence of such affairs on the upper Jordan and certainly could not have timed it to coincide with the moment of his crossing. So one needs to remember that there may be aspects that are miraculous even in a natural setting..although, as I have noted, I think the Jordan stoppage was on other grounds.

In the case of Joshua's long day (chapter 10) it is interesting to note that Joshua did not ask for an extension of the clock...he asked that the sun and moon "be silent." The Hebrew is pretty clear on this. We are not sure if he needed more sunlight or moonlight! But we are sure that he asked the heavenly bodies to do something other than normal. He requested that the normal procedure not be followed and that is why the verb "be silent" is used. Hebrew has plenty of words for "stand" but they are not the ones employed. Joshua is not elaborating on a false cosmology but is asking for an interruption in what the normal process may be.

Regarding these things, we also think it unwise to spend a lot of time looking for rational accounts. The attempts to prove the "long day" through all sorts of mathematical and astronomical data are abortive including the most recent popular one by Harold Hill. I am not saying we should not study them, I am saying we should not seek to rationalize them. If people will not believe one who came back from the dead, they are not likely to believe our reasoned accounts of what God has done.

The myth in classical understanding, is an account in which the gods live and act like people. From a conservative point of view there are not myths in Scripture although there are a few theophanies...where God appears, but never in the limitations of a man. Liberals see all the scenes where God does anything (including creation) as mythic.