

Can God Make a Rock So Big He Can't Lift It?

Alex McFarland

When speaking at a university or when answering questions in an open forum on Christianity, it is common for someone to smugly ask me, “Can God make a rock so big that he can't lift it?” The challenge inherent in this question is that there is something an omnipotent (all-powerful) God cannot do. Nonbelievers enjoy asking this question because it seems that either way we answer the question, we submit that there is, in fact, something God cannot accomplish. Either we answer that God can make a big rock he cannot *lift* or that God cannot *make* a rock big enough that he can't lift it. Thus the question seemingly poses an insolvable conundrum. However, close examination reveals that it does not put God in some kind of cosmic checkmate. In fact, the question in no way proves that there's something he cannot do. Rather, it is simply a meaningless question that implodes on itself.

Essentially, the questioner is asking, “Is there any way that the God who can make all things can make a rock so big that the God who can lift all things cannot lift it?” Worded this way, the inconsistency and meaninglessness of the question is revealed. It's actually a pseudo-question. It proposes impossible conditions and thus makes no sense. This means the question itself has no truth value, and thus cannot be evaluated as either true or false. Trying to answer this question is much like trying to answer, “What does the color blue smell like?”

The question also reveals false ideas about the biblical concept of *omnipotence*. When speaking of God's omnipotence, Christians are not claiming, “God can do anything at all.” Instead, omnipotence refers to God's power to do anything which is both consistent with his holy character and logically possible. The “big rock” question asks if God can do something logically impossible. His inability to do such a thing does not count against his power. For example, God cannot make a square circle. So what? It's a nonsense task. Likewise, it is a logical impossibility (and a nonsense thing to ask) for God to make a rock so big that he can't lift it. And since God always acts in ways that are consistent with his holy nature, his inability to lie or sin does not count against his omnipotence either (Ti 1:2; Jms 1:13). The things that are true about his character will always be true, and he cannot do anything to contradict them.

This non-question of smug skeptics actually reminds us that we serve a logical, coherent, and all-powerful God. Reason and coherence are hardwired into the fabric of reality—reflecting the orderly God who created it. Contradictory questions and meaningless word puzzles such as the “big rock” question implode on themselves and remind us that we will never be able to outsmart the Lord. Nothing we can do and no question we can ask could ever disprove God's omnipotence and perfect power.