

*the supernatural work of
God in the modern world*

MIRACLES TODAY

CRAIG S. KEENER

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Preface

Get Up and Walk

When I was an atheist, I didn't believe in miracles. After I was converted through a dramatic encounter with the Holy Spirit, I understood that God did spiritual things, but I still didn't expect him to do anything *visible*. That is, as a Christian, I now believed in miracles *in principle*, but I did not really expect to see one. That was when I met the first of the two women I will introduce in this preface, both of whom are coincidentally (but really) named Barbara.

Barbara in a Nursing Home

After my first summer of college I was helping at a Bible study at Rose Lane Nursing Home in Massillon, Ohio. There, every week, Barbara—an older woman bound to her wheelchair—lamented, “I wish I could walk! I wish I could walk!”¹

We were normally careful to avoid anything so controversial as actually praying for someone present to be healed. But one week Don, the middle-aged Bible study leader and a student at Fuller Theological Seminary, had had enough. He jumped from his seat and strode toward Barbara. “I'm sick of this,” he announced, then grabbed her hand. “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to rise up and walk!”

If faith is a bias, I was entirely innocent of it that evening. Frozen with panic, I expected Barbara to fall on the floor, possibly injured, and the nursing home to ban us from holding further Bible studies there. Moreover, the expression on Barbara's face conveyed what I felt: utter horror. When I recount the story today, I observe that if somebody's confidence healed a merely psychosomatic disorder, the confidence certainly wasn't hers. Still less was it mine.

Yet Don then walked Barbara around the room with his hand in one of hers. She stepped cautiously at first, utterly astonished at what was taking place. After Don had brought her around the room, she asked him to let her sit down, so he walked her back to her wheelchair. She sat down, still confused and trying to make sense of what had happened. Yet her newfound ability proved to be no mere momentary burst of emotion. From that day forward, Barbara came to the Bible studies each week, the first time holding on to a walker for security, but soon proudly abandoning it as she saw that now she really could walk completely by herself. Now Barbara would always declare, “I love this Bible study! I love this Bible study!”

A Barbara Sent Home to Die

Let me tell you now about a different Barbara, Barbara Cumiskey.² When she was a teenager, doctors diagnosed Barbara with multiple sclerosis (MS). Although MS can come in milder forms, Barbara’s condition deteriorated quickly. One day, she looked out the hospital window. With all her heart, she wished that she could just be a regular person, able to drive and live a normal life. Yet, no matter what, Barbara had decided that she was totally in love with the Lord. He was her reason to live.

From the age of fifteen to the age of thirty-one, Barbara spent three-quarters of her life in the hospital; the rest of the time she was being cared for at home. She had chronic pulmonary disease, with frequent infections and pneumonia. A surgeon, Dr. Harold Adolph, describes her condition toward the end of her suffering:

Barbara was one of the most hopelessly ill patients I ever saw. She was diagnosed at the Mayo Clinic as having multiple sclerosis. She had been admitted to the local hospital seven times in the year that I was first asked to see her. Each time she was expected to die. One diaphragm was completely paralyzed so that the lung was nonfunctional, and the other worked less than 50 percent. She had a tracheotomy tube in her neck for breathing, always required extra oxygen, and could speak only in short sentences because she easily became breathless. Her abdomen was swollen grotesquely because the muscles of her intestine did not work. Nor would her bladder function. She had not been able to walk for seven years. Her hand and arm movements were poorly coordinated. And she was blind except for two small areas in each eye.³

She was hooked up to various machines. Because her bowel was paralyzed, Dr. Adolph disconnected it and doctors provided her instead with an outside hookup. Another machine helped her breathe. Because she could not swallow, she had a feeding tube in her stomach.

Barbara needed so much care that, when she was home, a nurse or nurse’s aide remained with her most of the time. In her words, she was wrapped up like

a pretzel. Her feet pointed down, unable to rest flat against the floor—even had someone tried to stand her up. Her arms remained tight against her chest; normally when anyone tried to pull one of her arms away from her body, it would automatically clamp back up against her chest. Her hands curled up against the inside of her wrists, leaving them full of dead skin except when, periodically, someone would pry them open to clean them out.

Dr. Thomas Marshall had assumed her palliative care in what appeared to be the final weeks of her life. He recalls that her body was “contracted in a permanent fetal position.” “Her hands were so permanently flexed that her fingers nearly touched her wrists.”⁴ He sadly explained to the family that the next infection would likely kill her, and everyone agreed not to prolong her suffering with any further hospitalization or by attempting resuscitation with CPR.

Unable to free herself from her pretzel position or even to breathe normally, Barbara felt trapped inside her own body. Now, after sixteen years of physical deterioration, doctors had sent her home from the hospital one last time. They had regretfully warned her parents, “It’s unlikely that she’ll survive long enough for us to see her here again.”

The Voice

For more than four years, Barbara had not been able even to visit her Wesleyan church in Wheaton, Illinois. Nevertheless, her faithful pastor had visited her every day during that time. Now it was Pentecost Sunday, June 7, 1981, and two friends from her church visited her after the morning worship service. This time they showed up laden with cards and letters. Someone had called in a prayer request about her to the local Christian radio station, WMBI. Now 450 letters came to her in care of her church.

As her friends began reading the new letters to her, she suddenly heard a booming, authoritative voice over her left shoulder. “My child: *Get up and walk.*”

Because of the breathing tube, she could speak only when someone plugged the hole in her neck. They would do this whenever she looked agitated, and her friends, seeing her current agitation, plugged the hole. “God just told me to get up and walk,” she gasped. Her friends grew quiet, but Barbara insisted. “Go get my family!” she ordered urgently. Feeling her excitement, they dashed out of the room to find her family.

The sense of urgency in Barbara’s heart suddenly became too intense for her to wait for their return. Normally, it would take two people about two minutes to get her out of bed. They would slide her onto a lapboard and then into a chair. But now she did not have time to ponder what should have been impossible for her.

Abruptly, she jumped out of bed toward the direction of the voice. Equally abruptly, she found herself standing. Her feet had been too deformed even to wear slippers, but now she found them flat on the ground. Then she noticed that her

hands were both open at her sides, like anyone else's. What struck her next was that she could *see* her hands and feet—she was no longer blind! Freeing herself from the connected apparatus, she disconnected her tracheostomy tube from the oxygen tank and fastened the catheter bags to her clothes with safety pins.

At this point her friends returned to the room. As they caught each other's eyes, her friends started screaming and jumping. Her mother came running behind them, assuming from her friends' urgent summons that something terrible had happened to Barbara. As Barbara's mother burst into the room, however, she froze, transfixed with amazement. Not only was Barbara healed from her condition; beyond possible natural explanation, her muscles were not even atrophied as they normally would have been from years of nonuse. (Instant reversal of muscle atrophy is not usual even in miracle accounts.)

"Barbara—you have calves again!" her mother exclaimed. Barbara examined her own legs with astonishment.

"Dad!" Barbara now shouted.

"Just a minute," he called. He had not heard the cause of all the commotion. Since Barbara had become unable to speak normally, her father assumed that it was her sister calling him. But Barbara realized that she no longer had to wait for him to come to her.

At about this time, Angela, a friend who often came to see Barbara, arrived for a visit. Angela was an occupational therapist who knew that Barbara had reached a point of no return for MS. As she witnessed Barbara bolting out of the room, Angela was horrified. Nobly, she rushed to try to get Barbara's pulse. "Wait!" she shouted fearfully. "You can't be in bed that many years . . . and then just get up . . . and have a normal heartbeat!"

But Barbara could not wait for Angela. She raced down the wheelchair ramp. Angela desperately grabbed the oxygen tank, wheeling it down the ramp after her. "But you can't . . . you can't . . ." she kept protesting, while those who had followed Barbara out of her room just kept laughing.

Finally Barbara's dad spotted her. Overcome with joy, he waltzed Barbara around the room, her catheter bags still attached to her clothes. Soon, she recounts, she "ran outside and hit the blacktop on that 93-degree sunny day with feet that could now feel and [with new] sight! And what a dance I did as I inhaled the fragrant summer air and saw sights I had so missed!"⁵ Jesus was already Barbara's reason to live, but by this healing he had enabled her to live a normal life.

Word Spreads

The next day Barbara visited her doctor's office. Dr. Marshall recounts his feelings when, in the hallway of his medical office, he first saw Barbara walking toward him. "I thought I was seeing an apparition! Here was my patient, who was not expected to live another week, totally cured."

Over the next three and a half hours, she saw virtually every doctor in the office. Dr. Marshall reports that none of his colleagues “had ever seen anything like this before.” X-rays showed that even her collapsed lung was no longer collapsed.⁶ He removed all the tubes that could be removed without surgery. Barbara reports his verdict that day: “I’ll be the first to tell you: You’re completely healed. I can also tell you that this is medically impossible.” Dr. Adolph remarks that “her breathing was normal. The diaphragms were functioning normally.”⁷ He soon reconnected her bowel, which was now functional; her only health problem involved some complications from this new operation.

That week, WMBI broadcast her testimony. Eventually, the *Chicago Tribune*, some television stations, and many magazines and books carried her story. Dr. Marshall told Barbara, “You are now free to go out and live your life.” And Barbara has—now for roughly four decades with no recurrence of MS.⁸ Dr. Marshall deems it his “rare privilege to observe the Hand of God performing a true miracle.”⁹ Dr. Adolph notes that Barbara eventually studied surgical technology at the hospital “and even assisted me on several simpler operations. Both Barbara and I knew who had healed her.”¹⁰

One day the man who normally delivered oxygen to Barbara’s house arrived to bring more oxygen, and Barbara herself answered the door with a big smile. He was shocked: she would not be needing any more oxygen deliveries!¹¹

Just the Beginning

In December 2015, I first interviewed Barbara Cummiskey Snyder. Even though it was now many years after her healing, Barbara still brimmed with excitement as she shared her story. Dr. Adolph also confirmed his report for me personally, providing additional details.¹² Another doctor who had worked with her, Dr. Scott Kolbaba, further confirmed her story for me.¹³ He also sent me his recent book, *Physicians’ Untold Stories*. It collects accounts from twenty-six medical colleagues of what they believe have been various kinds of supernatural experiences, including Dr. Marshall’s account of Barbara’s healing. But I already have way too many accounts to include in this book! Indeed, in some months I receive multiple accounts of significant healings from sources that I trust (as well as some that I cannot adjudicate with confidence).

The interpretation of some accounts in this book may be somewhat ambiguous; the events may not be completely unique, but their coinciding with prayer will impress at least those more open to faith. The story of the first Barbara might be such a case: a nonbeliever might dismiss such an account as an interesting anomaly that just “happened” to occur during prayer. Barbara just “happened” to be able to walk but didn’t know it, and Don just got lucky when he commanded her to rise in Jesus’s name. To me, that seems a considerable stretch, but some prefer to take the leap of faith required by such an explanation rather than to

trust a God who sometimes acts unexpectedly. The story of the second Barbara, physically incapable of walking but completely restored when she heard a divine voice, seems harder to dismiss in such terms.

I will spend most of this book sharing some of the healing reports from around the world that eyewitnesses have shared with me. Toward the end of the book, I will explore what such reports may mean for us today.

Whether you start from much faith, little faith, or no faith at all, I invite you to explore this book's interesting "anomalies"—and see whether some challenge you to believe more. Before I turn to such accounts, though, I need to explain why I'm writing this book at this time.

Introduction

Miracles Books, Old and New

Many scholars assume that biblical accounts of miracles could not ultimately reflect information from the reports of eyewitnesses. This assumption, however, does not match known reality since millions of eyewitnesses today claim such experiences. To challenge many fellow scholars' skepticism that such experiences occur, I wrote my 1,100-page *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*.¹ In it I provide modern analogies for most of the sorts of miracle accounts we have in the New Testament.

Miracles the Last Time Around

The book won several awards, including one in *Christianity Today*, but what took me particularly by surprise was how widely the book was received. There remains enough prejudice against miracles in many academic circles that I had feared I was committing academic suicide. Nevertheless, I was convinced that the reality the book described was genuine and needed to be heard. Although I felt that I was sticking my neck out, the guillotine's blade—for whatever reasons—proved less lethal than expected.

Some vocal atheists on the internet predictably panned the book, but they demurred mainly regarding the book's secondary thesis: that many purported miracles are genuine acts of God. They did not (and could not) object so much to the book's primary thesis: that eyewitnesses experience what they consider to be miracles today, and that there is no reason to suppose that matters were different in the first century. Meanwhile, Christians from a wide range of traditions embraced the book, as did, for different reasons, some members of other faith traditions.

One problem with such a massive volume was that many people were more likely to talk about it than to actually read it. Both detractors and supporters on the internet sometimes claimed more for the book than it actually argued. In fact, detractors often criticized examples from the section of the book illustrating the range of contemporary testimonies without noticing that it differs from the part of the book where I engage potential explanations and highlight some cases as particularly compelling.

Given the time needed for research and being a full-time professor, I usually cannot respond to internet critics with too much time on their hands, especially when they have not actually bothered to *read* the book. Often critics present a skewed critique, caricaturing the work to produce impressions of it quite different from those someone actually reading the work would get.² Moreover, some protest against healing by using logically irrelevant arguments, such as the argument that healing often does not happen. No one, however, claims that healing always *does* happen. By way of analogy, even the best medical technology does not *always* bring healing, but we do not for that reason dismiss its value when it does. (More thoughts on this later.)

Miracles This Time Around

In fairness to those who did not read the entire book, reading 1,100 pages can take a rather long time. Although some PhD programs use *Miracles* as a textbook, it does not seem suitable as a supplemental undergraduate or seminary textbook. Nor is it the sort of book I can hand to a new acquaintance on a plane (at least, not without injury to my aged arm), in contrast to my frequently given little book, *Impossible Love*, cowritten with my wife.³ For a number of years, then, I have realized the need for a more concise, less detailed work about miracles.

In December 2016, Lee Strobel interviewed me extensively for his book *The Case for Miracles*.⁴ As I have told Lee, his excellent book meets the need for a solid but more readable book on the subject (not unlike some other fairly popular-level books).⁵ Thus I wavered about whether I needed to write this second, shorter book on miracles.

But while these other books communicate to their audiences on a better level than I could, I gradually realized that I still had something valuable to contribute to my own usual readership. I simply needed some time to get it written. When the Henry Center at Trinity International University provided the opportunity for a study leave specifically on this topic, it appeared that the time had come.

I have tried to keep the chapters short enough to be readable, although some subjects required somewhat longer-than-average chapters and others allowed shorter ones.

Although I have reused some stories from the larger book on miracles, especially some testimonies I could verify from within my own circle and some medi-

cal accounts, I have focused more here on newer accounts. I have thus omitted hundreds of older accounts and included some accounts of varying evidential weight, especially in the earlier chapters, simply because they are new and thus supplement the samples in the earlier volume.

What Not to Expect

Nevertheless, what I include here remains merely *samples*, and I have also omitted many newer accounts. Indeed, so many testimonies have come my way since the publication of *Miracles* that I probably could have written another massive volume. I have omitted some well-documented miracles because some sources, on reflection, preferred to keep their stories private. Other times I have omitted stories simply because I lacked further room. I apologize to the vast number of sources, including academic colleagues and students, whose stories I did not include here.

With just a few exceptions, I also omitted a majority of accounts associated with figures well known for ministries of healing. Some, like Daniel Kolenda, whose ministry I appreciate and trust, have witnessed far more healings than a book such as this one could begin to describe.⁶ (One can, for example, watch what everyone present understood as the healing of the Muslim king of Tamale, Ghana, in the film *Finger of God 2*, when Kolenda prays in Jesus's name.) Though I pause to acknowledge it here, Kolenda's ministry merits books of its own, as do some other ministries. For the sake of welcoming the broadest range of Western readers, however, I have chosen to focus in this book more often on individual stories from less widely known settings.

I should warn readers at the outset that the samples included in this book are not meant as models for everyone to follow. Whatever patterns might emerge in how I recount the stories, the differences among them preclude us from taking any one expression of faith as the right expression and others as wrong ones. As in the Bible, God chooses to work today with different people in different ways. Moreover, because of its subject, this book recounts more dramatic healings than non-healings, but God works through people with different abilities and disabilities, and those who are healed in one area do not always experience healing in all areas. Despite limited reflections in later chapters (especially in part 7), this book is more about the reality of miracles than about the theology of why or how miracles sometimes happen or do not happen. This does not mean that those questions do not matter; they are, however, sometimes harder to answer.

Except for brief treatment in appendix B, I chose to limit this book to reports of Christian miracles rather than opening up another can of worms. (Still, in the earlier book I did survey a large range of sources regarding non-Christian miracle claims—contrary, again, to comments from some reviewers who did not actually read that book.)⁷ I have also chosen, however, not to restrict it further. Some Christian groups mistrust other Christian groups, and so perhaps they will

recommend this book with a warning label: “Ignore testimonies from [fill in the blank: Catholics? charismatics? evangelicals? mainline Protestants?].” Likewise, some critics complain about examples of particular ministries or witnesses they mistrust, using them to excuse overlooking other witnesses. This commits a logical fallacy akin to supposing that if one appears to discredit one witness in court, the entire slate of witnesses must thereby collapse. As a New Testament scholar, I probably have disagreements with everybody on something; what would we scholars have to write about if we never held some different views? But as important as theological distinctives may be to those who affirm them, they are not the subject of this book. If there seems reason to me to believe that God has acted on behalf of someone he loves, regardless of this person’s theological orientation, I am more than happy to celebrate God’s choice. Meanwhile, I still have plenty to learn myself, including from friends whose views differ from mine on various matters. When the Lord heals anybody, the credit goes to him as healer, not to those of us who are healed or who petition him.

Anyone who fears that the present book lacks sufficient documentation regarding complex philosophic and other issues should feel free to consult *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, which cites some four thousand sources. The present book is designed to be more useful to general readers, as a supplemental classroom text, and for those who liked the earlier book very much without ever getting around to actually reading it.

Readers who want something even more reader-friendly than my opening discussion are free to skip ahead to the miracle stories. (Though the graphic nature of some of the medical ailments described there is less reader-friendly than the healings, it serves to explain why they are healings.) But those who want to learn more about why some people argue against miracles and why I argue for them should start from the beginning.

Perspectives on Miracles

Beliefs are not only a matter of evidence but also a matter of the interpretive grids through which we read the evidence. If a preacher gets struck by lightning, does this mean that God is judging a hypocrite? That the devil hates preachers? Or maybe just that preachers, like other people, shouldn't run around too much outside during thunderstorms?

The same issue arises with miracle claims. Everyone acknowledges the occurrence of some anomalies—experiences that do not easily fit current understandings of nature. But do we think of it differently if a striking anomaly happens just when some people pray for it to happen? Or if it happens on multiple occasions, just when some people pray for it to happen? Or if a particularly improbable anomaly happens after someone predicts it?

Because of different assumptions, different people require different standards of evidence. Someone particularly gullible may accept as a miracle anything that anyone claims to be such. Someone particularly skeptical may reject an event as a miracle regardless of the attestation and natural improbability. Someone who believes in a God active in the universe allows for the potential of miracles occurring; someone adamantly opposed to God's existence cannot allow for that possibility. As we shall see, skepticism is no less a historically conditioned assumption than the reverse.

But speaking of miracles occurring, what *is* a miracle? Good question.

Chapter 1

What Is a Miracle, Anyway?

One problem for anyone writing a book about miracles is that there is no universally agreed-upon definition.¹ In popular usage, miracles might include the New York Mets winning the World Series in 1969 or the Anaheim Angels winning it in 2002. While it might indeed take a miracle at least for a team including any Craig Keeners to win a baseball game, this book is using the term in a more precise way. Still, not *too* precise.

Extraordinary Divine Action

Probably the most common definition of a miracle throughout history, from Augustine to Aquinas, has been a divine action that transcends the ordinary course of nature and so generates awe. By “transcending the ordinary course of nature,” these thinkers don’t just mean an unusually awesome sunset. They mean something you would never expect to happen on its own.

Now, that is a somewhat subjective definition, because some things are more unexpected than others. Likewise, not everybody responds to even the most dramatic “miracles” with awe. In the Bible, when God parted the sea so his people could escape their pursuers, his people were impressed. Their pursuers, by contrast, had a different theology. They didn’t doubt that the God of their former slaves had *some* power (he was, after all, a god), but they were sure that their own gods (including their king) were stronger, so they continued their pursuit.

David Hume, whom you’ll meet more officially in chapter 3, defined a miracle as a violation of natural law. One problem with this definition is that barely any of the biblical miracles, which Hume has at least partly in view, ever claimed to violate natural law. Even the particularly dramatic miracle of God’s parting of

the sea did not work against natural law: the Bible says that God used a strong east wind to part the sea (Exod. 14:21). A strong-enough wind can move water; what meteorologists call “wind setdown” sometimes does. But moving water in such a way as to part the sea, letting all the Israelites cross precisely when their lives depended on it, does not look very much like an accident. The odds of such a coincidence are so low that ordinarily, for practical purposes, we would not seriously consider them. Even in dramatic acts of God in the Bible, God typically uses what he has already created rather than starting over by creating something new.

There are other problems with Hume’s definition of *miracle* (not least his definitions of *violation* and *natural law*), but suffice it to note for now that his definition is unhelpful for the present subject. Apart from creation, the virgin birth, and the new creation introduced with Jesus’s bodily resurrection, the Bible itself does not claim many miracles in the law-violating sense. A book giving examples of such miracles today might prove rather concise.

Theologians today thus often echo the more traditional historic approach to miracles, referring to them as “special divine action.”²² This label is meant to differentiate miracles from divine action more generally, since Christians affirm that God works in all sorts of ways around us all the time. But what is the cutoff where “general” divine action becomes “special” divine action? How do we classify, for example, an extraordinarily fast recovery from surgery?

The boundaries are fuzzy, but we can at least provide paradigmatic examples of each. By analogy, the boundary between “long hair” and “short hair” may be unclear, but most of us would at least recognize Samson’s proverbial hair as long and the hair on a mostly bald head (mine, for example) as short. In the same way, those of us who believe in God regard life as God’s gift to everyone who is alive, but if someone comes back to life who has been clinically dead for an hour, and suffers no brain damage, most of us regard that as a miracle. Between examples that would convince nearly everyone and those that would convince scarcely anyone exists a broad middle range that will probably include some inauthentic cases and exclude some genuine ones; but enough genuine and convincing ones should remain to make the point. Miracles don’t always happen—but sometimes they do.

Burden of Proof

Many passages in the Bible speak of miracles as “signs,” experiences that get people’s attention. The Bible does speak of some less extraordinary events, such as circumcision or a rainbow, as signs that signify or communicate something. But often the Bible speaks of more extraordinary signs as special acts of God that get attention and communicate something about him. These include events such as the exodus plagues (e.g., Exod. 10:1–2; Ps. 78:43), kingdom healings (e.g., Acts 2:22, 43; 4:16, 22, 30), and nature miracles (e.g., John 2:11; 6:14). Again, not everyone responds positively to such signs. In one town where the apostle Paul

and his colleague Barnabas preached, signs got people's attention, but not all the attention was positive. Some, to be sure, responded to the signs by accepting their message; others, who refused the message, just became more hostile (Acts 14:3–4).

We all evaluate miracle reports through our own assumptions. If a person who has not walked for ten years can suddenly walk after prayer, albeit with some support, I would normally see that as divine enablement. Barring an additional miracle, the person will need some support because her muscles will still be atrophied for a time; achieving suddenly what might take physical therapy weeks or months remains extraordinary. Some reject such a healing as incomplete, demanding that divine intervention restore every organ to perfection. We do not, however, live in a currently perfect world; unless you are Superman or the Hulk, even what we accept as normal functionality has limits. Likewise, if after prayer eyesight immediately improves from legal blindness to functional sight, vision need not be 20/20 for us to infer special divine action. If God has improved your sight beyond available human means but you still need glasses, don't complain. Lots of the rest of us have to wear glasses too. If Jesus resuscitates a twelve-year-old young woman, he may still request that her parents feed her rather than supernaturally filling her empty stomach (Mark 5:43). But again, some people work with different assumptions about how a God must display himself, and they therefore dismiss evidence that does not match their assumptions.

How extraordinary must an event be to get someone's attention? Further, how much evidence does it take to convince someone? That depends on who the person is and what the person's starting assumptions are. If I am adamant that miracles are impossible, in principle I might reject any amount of evidence. If I already trust God, I will thank God for even the smallest details of my life.

Most people, even if they do not trust God in details, are open to evidence. Yet standards for evidence vary. It is possible to be too gullible and be convinced by simple magic tricks. Conversely, some people are so opposed to miracles that they keep raising the bar of evidence to evade them. They may say, "There is no medical documentation for miracles." If I show them medical documentation, they may say, "Just because that was unusual doesn't mean it couldn't happen on its own. Show me someone who was raised from the dead." If I give examples of people raised from the dead, they may say, "Well, *I* didn't see that happen."

Twice I have asked skeptical academic friends, "Would you believe it was a miracle if you did see someone raised from the dead?" and they have replied, "No." I think what they meant was, "Miracles can't happen, so I would just say it was unexplained." But if someone uses this approach, what sort of evidence *would* they accept? If they say "none," then it's clear that they value their starting premise more than any amount of evidence, making it disingenuous for them to ask for any. They had better not accuse all *Christians* of being closed-minded!

Fortunately, most people are not *that* skeptical. It is thus helpful to provide solid evidence where we can. And fortunately, there is a lot of evidence for those who are willing to believe.

I should conclude this section with a caution, however: miracles do not “prove” God. If you are inflexibly committed to finding another explanation, you always will. Even if you see the sea part at just the right time, you could choose to dismiss it as a one-chance-in-a-billion coincidence. (In the Bible itself, Pharaoh, at least, did not seem sufficiently impressed to halt his pursuit.) But if you are open to the reality of God, what you recognize as miracles will get your attention and invite your faith in him. And if you already believe in God, they will give you additional reasons for gratitude.

“Ordinary” Blessings

There are greater miracles than the ones this book addresses, but people regularly ignore or even reject them. Because they are part of the “normal” course of nature, available to everybody, most people take them for granted. Hidden in plain sight, they’re not “extraordinary,” hence not what we usually call miracles.

Although this book is about “special” divine action, Christians (and most other theists) believe that general divine action is all around us. The psalmist already marvels at God’s glory in nature (Ps. 19:1). Ancient, non-Christian Stoic philosophers recognized divine design in nature.³ The apostle Paul says that God’s power is evident in his creation, especially in our own selves. He explains that our proper response should be gratitude (Rom. 1:19–21).

One need not believe that God micromanages every detail to affirm that something about our universe seems to exceed random chance. Both the Bible (Gen. 1:24) and our knowledge of the cosmos suggest that God likes to create things that not only exist but develop and replicate on their own. But is their existence an accident? What are the odds of a universe accidentally arising with just the right, extraordinarily precise conditions to support life? Exact calculations vary, but the parameters are so exquisitely fine-tuned that their generation by chance seems utterly implausible—often calculated as far less than even one in a trillion trillion trillion trillion.⁴ In daily life, none of us would stake our lives on such minuscule odds. From a Christian perspective, it seems a testament to some thinkers’ faith commitment in anything-but-God that they would desperately cling to such minute possibilities. This may be one reason why a far greater number of academic works about theism in philosophy of religion today defend rather than contest the existence of God.⁵

Some respond that we just blissfully happen to live in the one life-permitting universe that exists out of a seemingly infinite number of (unattested) universes. In terms of economy of logic, however, it seems much simpler to posit a single designer beyond the universe than to posit trillions of trillions of universes.⁶ And even if one does opt for this multiverse hypothesis (the idea of many unconnected universes), one merely pushes the design question back one level: so far, all the models for generating many universes require immense precision in the settings.⁷

At a 2012 Harvard Veritas Forum that may be viewed online, John Lennox, now emeritus professor of mathematics at Oxford University, recounted a discussion he once had over dinner with a reductionist colleague.⁸ The colleague insisted that nothing exists beyond physics and chemistry. Lennox then pointed out two words on their menu. “Explain to me those marks based only on the paper and the ink,” he demanded. After a moment of silence, his colleague, a leading biochemist, admitted, “One cannot explain meaning apart from intelligence.” Random marks communicate little, but specifically arranged marks designed to represent meaning communicate information.

Lennox goes on to point to a much more complex language, one we must use computer information technology to describe. Human DNA uses an alphabet of four letters, arranged in base pairs in a mostly specific sequence to compose a word some three billion letters long. Did chance and necessity organize these from scratch? Their design suggests both intelligence and benevolence: God purposed and desired our existence.⁹

What are the odds that we humans, the most intelligent form of physical being we know of in the universe, would, merely by random chance, have the abstract reasoning capable of figuring these things out? Christians differ among ourselves about how we got here. Some say God created us directly, whereas others say that God used evolution as a process with some predesignated outcomes. Either way, our existence does not make sense apart from an ultimate designer. Throughout most of history, natural selection by itself has lacked much incentive to produce abstract mathematical reasoning.

Some people view such a design as wasteful. Why would some God create billions of trillions of stars in the universe if life on our planet is supposed to be so special? Why would he allow the development of matter for more than thirteen billion years before forming humanity? Why would he allow suffering in the world before someday creating a world without suffering? But we can speak of “waste” as a problem only if there is a limited supply.¹⁰ Some thinkers also suggest that there had to be enough matter in the universe for the universe to expand at the right rate for galaxies, stars, and thus planets to form.¹¹ Humans make up very little of the matter in the universe, but in terms of information content, we are, so far as we know empirically, its most complex entities. We are the pinnacle of God’s creation, his special delight. The Bible suggests that someday we will be able to look back over history and see God accomplishing his purposes for those who will be his forever, despite what looks to us now like a lot of waste as other things run their own course.

Everyone has starting assumptions. Biblical faith provides glasses that enable our eyes to see God’s work all around us. Yet when people look around with nonbelieving sunglasses, they do not recognize God’s activity around them. In that sense, they take for granted sunlight, air to breathe, and often life itself.

Special divine action reinvites most people’s attention. If it weren’t special—that is, if miracles happened all the time when we wanted them—we might take

them for granted the same way we do the more “regular” patterns God authored in nature. God arranged for our bodies to be able to heal themselves of many infections, for example. But if healing *always* took place, spiritual sunglasses-wearers might well dismiss that gift as simply the ordinary course of nature as well.¹²

New Life in Christ

Most of this book is about special events. But I would be remiss to leave the impression that only what appears to others as extraordinary is divine action. Whether we label it a “miracle” or not, it is divine action that makes possible a relationship with God. The creator who made humans special, intelligent, and relational desires a relationship with us. We humans cut off that relationship from our side by neglecting him and mistreating others who are no less special to him. Yet this God who desired us enough to create us for himself sacrificed his own heart to restore us to him. He thus sent his own Son united with our humanity and mortality so he could bring us back into relationship with himself.

My own faith is God’s merciful gift to me; I surely didn’t deserve it. I started out as an unchurched atheist who knew a lot more about ancient Greek myths than about Christianity, while for years some devout Methodist relatives prayed faithfully for my family. As an atheist, I allowed Christianity only about a 2 percent chance of being true. (Technically, by that point I was somewhat agnostic since I was no longer 100 percent certain about atheism. But I didn’t tell anyone that, since I enjoyed looking down on most theists.)

It looked to me as though most people who claimed to be Christians (back then it was maybe 80 percent of Americans) did not live as if they took their faith seriously. With a few exceptions that I treated as anomalous outliers, Christians didn’t seem to live like people who owed their entire existence and purpose to a creator. Either these people who claimed to be Christians were quite stupid, or they didn’t believe what they claimed. “If I ever believed there was a God,” I reasoned, “I would owe God everything. I would give God everything.” But if Christians didn’t take their faith seriously, why should I?

Once I started thinking about it, however, I didn’t want to stake my eternal destiny on even a 2 percent possibility of being wrong. I wasn’t familiar with Pascal’s wager, but that concept would have made sense to me: the stakes involved in trusting or denying God are rather high. I had been convinced enough of my atheism to make fun of Christians, but I was scared to make fun of God. I was not so sure of myself that I wouldn’t consider evidence if somebody presented some. Indeed, on occasion I secretly asked any superior being that might be listening, if there was one, to show me the truth. For a seeker, asking God to show himself to you is not a bad place to begin. He shows himself more often where he is more welcome—though he does not usually show himself on our terms. I was hoping for empirical or historical evidence, of which, I now know, there is a lot.¹³ A book

like this one could also have gotten my attention. In my case, though, the Lord chose a more humbling route.

What convinced me initially was not historical evidence, scientific evidence, witnessing a miracle, or anything of the sort. One day, some Bible-wielding, conservative Baptist street preachers in black suits—students at a local, church-run Bible college—confronted me with what their Bible said about Jesus: God’s Son, Jesus Christ, died and rose to save me. I argued with them for forty-five minutes and finally demanded, “If there’s a God, where did the dinosaur bones come from?” The question is logically fallacious—why should the existence of God conflict with the existence of dinosaurs?—but neither I nor (apparently) they yet understood that point. On the spot and having to come up with a quick answer, one retorted, “The devil put them there.” Disgusted, I walked away. (Their off-the-cuff response to my question about dinosaurs still draws my hearers’ laughs; they were certainly not paleontologists. But they *did* know what their Bible said about being made right with God.)

Yet I experienced a sort of evidence that was less public but more compelling on the personal level. Over the next hour or two, I was overwhelmed with God’s own presence until my knees buckled under me and I gave in. I didn’t understand how God made me right with him by Jesus’s death and resurrection, but since that was what he was saying, I accepted it. I’d studied various religions and philosophies, but I experienced something that day that I had never experienced before. The presence, which I have often experienced since then, was more real and direct than that of another person physically talking to me in the same room. I actually felt God come inside me.

The next few years were a journey of finding out the answers to the kinds of questions those Baptist Bible college students understandably hadn’t been able to answer. Nevertheless, biblically speaking, God himself had entered my life and begun to make me new. No physical healing I have experienced or witnessed has been as clear a divine action in my life as the adventure of becoming new and thus experiencing a foretaste of the future new creation. So while that experience is too personal, and hence “subjective,” to count as “evidence” for most people who haven’t experienced it, to me personally it is no less persuasive than any “public” miracle I recount in this book.

All this is to say that, even though this book is about what people call miracles, more narrowly defined, those of us who are believers would never limit God’s action to what gets everybody else’s attention.