### Miracles

**1. Definition**

From beginning to end, the Bible repeatedly testifies of the miracle-working power of Yahweh. This distinguishes the Bible from other literature. Except for myths and legends, no other publication contains such a quantity and quality of supernatural manifestations. Unlike myths and legends, the Scriptures present us with genuine history, written in a serious historical style.

A well-accepted definition of a miracle is a violation of natural law or an exception from it. Thomas Aquinas states, “Things that are at times accomplished, apart from the generally established order of things, are commonly called miracles.”[[1]](#footnote-1) C. S. Lewis states that a miracle is “an interference with Nature by a supernatural power.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Purtill provides a similar definition: “I propose to define a miracle as an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting.”[[3]](#footnote-3) That is, a miracle must serve as a testimony of God’s special intervention.

Helm deems it necessary to qualify this definition.[[4]](#footnote-4) In his opinion, one should not sharply contrast miracles with natural laws, since they all issue from the same Source. For Helm, a miracle is simply another means by which God operates in the universe.

Aquinas feels the same, that aside from the regular natural processes established by God, He may exert a direct influence on nature in order to produce an unexpected result, i.e., a “miracle.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Augustine thought along these lines as well to the degree that he rejected the idea that miracles contradicted natural law, since both fulfill the will of God, which cannot contradict itself.

In light of the above considerations, we affirm with Langford a more precise definition of the miraculous. A miracle is the employment of natural processes in such a way as to produce a result that does not correspond to what one might predict from natural laws alone.[[6]](#footnote-6) Of course, we include in this definition that God authors the miracle to accomplish a certain aim. We also acknowledge that not all supernatural happenings are from God – false miracles of demonic origin also occur (see Ex 7:11; Deut 13:1-3).[[7]](#footnote-7)

**2. Biblical Data**

The Bible begins with the greatest miracle recorded in history – the creation of the heavens and the earth from nothing. Since that time, this miracle of God’s creative genius does not cease to amaze all who study it.

The Torah also records how God performed miracles. Every time that Laban said to Jacob “’The speckled shall be your wages,’ then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, ‘The striped shall be your wages,’ then all the flock brought forth striped” (Gen 31:8). Moreover, God gave Abraham and Sarah a child in spite of “the deadness of Sarah's womb” (Rom 4:19).

It is nearly impossible to list all the miracles that God did through Moses on Israel’s behalf. God’s wondrous works in connection with the exodus from Egypt hold special significance. First, they were powerful enough to eventually convince Pharaoh to release God’s people. Second, they served as a witness to surrounding nations that the God of Israel was God Almighty: “The peoples have heard, they tremble” (Ex 15:14). Third, in this way Yahweh demonstrated His superiority over all the “gods” of Egypt, whose power could not compare to His: “Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments – I am Yahweh” (Ex 12:12). In fact, when the magicians of Egypt were unable to match the miracles done through Moses, they acknowledged, “This is the finger of God” (Ex 8:19).

It is interesting that when Moses performed miracles, He often employed his staff, which was, in fact, called the “staff of God” (Ex 4:20; 17:9). With his staff, he summoned the plaques of Egypt (Ex chps. 7-10), parted the Red Sea (Ex 14:16), and secured victory over the Amalekites (Ex 17:9).

However, Moses’ use of the staff was likely a condescension from the Lord. Only after Moses showed hesitation to accept his commission from Yahweh did the latter command him, “Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs” (Ex 4:4, 17). Moses’ staff, which he had already carried with him many years, was a familiar source of comfort to him. However, God needs no physical instrument to manifest His power.

Furthermore, we read much about the miracles that Yahweh did in the wilderness for Israel: manna, water from the rock, quail, the pillar of cloud, etc. Israel was witness to God’s mighty deeds for 40 years. Another remarkable event occurred at this time as well – a donkey spoke in human language (Num 22:28).

After Moses’ death, the operation of miracles did not cease. God gave a special sign to indicate that Joshua was the new recipient of this grace – He parted the waters of the Jordan at Joshua’s command (Josh 3:14-17). God also gave a miraculous victory over the Canaanites, during which He even stopped the sun in the sky and hurled large hailstones from heaven on Israel’s enemies (Josh 10:11-14).

After the conquest of Canaan, Israel wandered from the Lord. During this time, it is not surprising that few miracles occurred. The situation even came to the point that Gideon said to the angel visiting him, “Where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, ‘Did not Yahweh bring us up from Egypt?’” (Judg 6:13).

When Israel repented and returned to the Lord, though, God raised up deliverer-judges, through whom He accomplished supernatural deliverances. For example, Deborah and Barak struck down Sisera and his 900 iron chariots (Judg 4:13). Gideon defeated the host of Midian with 300 men (Judg 7).

Samson’s story and his legendary display of strength is likely the most noteworthy among the accounts of the judges. As was the case with Moses and his staff, God’s power was again connected with a physical item – Samson’s hair. Only when his hair was cut did his strength leave him (Judg 16:19). The next time, in fact, when Samson’s might is mentioned is when “the hair of his head began to grow again” (Judg 16:22).

The text plainly associates Samson’s supernatural strength with his hair. We dare not, however, conclude from this that his hair contained magical powers. God has full right and freedom to connect His power with a material object. Unlike magic, though, Yahweh is not bound to manifest His power in response to this object’s use so that people can thereby manipulate Him. We note later in the Old Testament narrative that God’s people tried to force the Lord to act in their defense by bringing the ark of the covenant to the battle (1 Kin 4:3). Yet, their strategy failed.

Toward the conclusion of the period of the judges, God raised up for Israel the prophet Samuel, who not only possessed an amazing prophetic gift, but also was God’s instrument to bring victory in war (1 Sam 7). Once, God granted him a supernatural confirmation from heaven (1 Sam 12:16-18).

We also marvel at the ministries of the dynamic duo – Elijah and Elisha. Yahweh did powerful works through them: multiplication of food (1 Kin 17:14-16; 2 Kin 4:4-7; 4:42-44), supernatural conception of a child (2 Kin 4:15-17), resurrection of the dead (1 Kin 17:19-24; 2 Kin 4:32-37), withholding and granting rain (1 Kin 17-18), parting of waters (2 Kin 2:8-14), detoxification of food (2 Kin 4:38-41), blinding and opening eyes (2 Kin 6:17-18), recovery of an axe head (2 Kin 6:3-7), and provision of water in the wilderness (2 Kin 3:16-20).

Several aspects of these prophets’ ministries deserve special attention. First, Elijah considered supernatural signs a divine confirmation of his prophetic ministry. Therefore, he challenged the prophets of Baal to show their power on Mount Carmel (1 Sam 18:19ff). Second, Yahweh not only did miracles through the prophets, He also performed wonders for them, supernaturally providing food for Elijah (1 Kin 17:6; 19:8).

In Elisha’s case, the prophet once anticipated that Yahweh would operate through his staff (2 Kin 4:29ff). In this instance, however, God worked in a different way. On the other hand, God did perform an object-mediated miracle when He raised someone from the dead through contact with the departed Elisha’s bones (2 Kin 13:20-21). We also observe that the degree of success that Joash would experience in battle depended on how many times he struck the ground with his arrows (2 Kin 13:18-19). Yet again, this is not magic. Most likely, this test showed Joash’s lack of zeal for victory, which was the real cause of his limited success.

A final noteworthy miracle in the Old Testament historical material concerns the time that through Isaiah, God caused the shadow on Hezekiah’s stairway to move backwards (2 Kin 20:11). This reminds us of the similar “sun miracle” of Joshua.

In the poetic books, no miracles are recorded due to the lack of historical material in them. Nevertheless, the psalmists rehearse miracles that Yahweh performed previously among His people. Yahweh “sat {as King} at the flood” (Ps 29:10) and miraculously provided Israel with food in the wilderness (Ps 105:40-41; сf. Neh 9:11-15; Isa 48:21). The Lord’s miracles inspire the psalmist to worship Him:

One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate. Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness (Ps 145:4-6).

The Psalms pay special attention to what the Lord did through Moses and Aaron against the Egyptians (Ps 105:26-36; 135:8-11; 136:10-15). For the remainder of Israeli history, the account of the miraculous exodus from Egypt was the foundation for Israel’s faith in Yahweh their God. This is evident by the manifold repetition of the saying, “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”[[8]](#footnote-8) God reminds Israel of this history especially to emphasize His covenant with them. Through this event, the Lord “made a name for (Himself) as {it is} this day” (Neh 9:10).

In the prophetic literature, besides retelling God’s deeds of the past and prophesying of future events (see Ezek 25:5-17), the more concrete miracles are reserved for the book of Daniel. First, Daniel and his comrades are endowed with supernatural wisdom – ten times better than their contemporaries (Dan 1). Second, Yahweh supernaturally rescues Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego from the fiery furnace (Dan 3). Third, the Lord closes the lions’ mouths so as to preserve Daniel’s life (Dan 6). Finally, the book of Daniel contains incredibly precise futuristic prophecies, even predicting the time of Messiah’s coming (Dan 9:24-25).

God’s display of miracles continues in the New Testament, and even increases. Jesus’ miracle ministry begins from the time the Spirit descends on Him at His water baptism. The quantity of His miracles is nearly innumerable. The apostle John could not record them all in his Gospel, and even remarks, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written” (Jn 21:25).

Christ’s miracles were not only many in number, but also various in type. Although much attention is paid to His works of healing and casting out demons (Matt 8:16; Mk 1:34; Lk 7:21), He also raised people from the dead (Lk 8:49-56; Jn 11:41-44) and directed His power toward nature. He was able to multiply food (Matt 14:15-21), walk on water (Matt 14:22ff), still a storm (Lk 8:24), and command a miraculous catch of fish (Lk 5:6-7; Jn 21:5-6). The Lord also possessed supernatural knowledge (Lk 22:7-13) and predicted future events (Matt 16:21). The people of His day rightly remarked about Him, “He has done all things well” (Mk 7:37). Even the Savior’s birth was supernatural – He was born of a virgin (Matt 1:23-25). Signs accompanied His birth (Lk 2; Matt 2), along with the birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:36-37; 63-66).

Jesus did not do miracles to impress the masses. They served as an indication of His divine nature and mission. The apostle John makes special note of this: “But the testimony which I have is greater than {the testimony of} John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish – the very works that I do –testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me” (Jn 5:36).

After Jesus’ ascension to heaven, His ministry continued through the Church. Acts 1:1 testifies of this: “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach.” In other words, all that Jesus *began* to do, He continues to do through His Church.

Correspondingly, in the ministry of the apostolic church we see the same types of miracles that Jesus performed. Thus, the Savior’s words were fulfilled, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater {works} than these he will do; because I go to the Father” (Jn 14:12). When the Son returned to the Father, He poured out the same Spirit of power that He received before embarking on His own ministry.

So then, just as their Lord did, the disciples healed the sick and drove out demons (Acts 8:7), raised the dead (Acts 9:36-42), had supernatural knowledge (Acts 5:1-10), and predicted the future (Acts 11:28). Even by means of Peter’s shadow and clothing from Paul, God healed the sick (Acts 5:15; 19:12). This was not the disciples’ first experience of supernatural power. Jesus had given them authority and power to heal the sick and cast out devils while He was still with them (Matt 10:1). The signs performed by the apostolic church served the same purpose miracles did in Jesus’ ministry – to testify of Him (Acts 4:29-30).

In the New Testament period, one sign appeared that had never been granted before – speaking in other tongues, which was associated with receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:45-46; 19:5-6).

Finally, the epistles testify that God’s miraculous deeds were not limited to apostles and evangelists. They were manifest in local congregation, as noted in the following passages:

- …so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:7)

- So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:5)

- …and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up (Jam 5:15)

**3. Theological Reflections**

Scholars reflect on the mechanism by which God does miracles. Some posit that a miracle in nothing other than the display of unusual natural laws. According to this understanding, a miracle is not, in fact, a supernatural event. Certain natural laws simply appear rarely, and when they do, they are taken for miracles. A second view is that when God does a miracle, He interrupts the operation of natural laws. The most likely variant is that God supersedes the forces of nature to perform a supernatural act.[[9]](#footnote-9)

We must also distinguish miracles from anomalies. Genuine miracles have a specific purpose to create a certain effect. God does not do supernatural works for their own sake. He is pursuing an aim. An anomaly is a rarely occurring phenomenon that has no real purpose or aim.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Miracles can also be categorized as “first class” or “second class” phenomena.[[11]](#footnote-11) Wonders of the “first class” are works that, from a human perspective, are impossibilities. Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is an example, since humanly speaking people do not rise from the dead after several days in the tomb.

A “second class” miracle is an event that can occur in nature, yet it occurs in such an unusual manner to warrant classifying it as a miracle. The Red Sea parting could be classed here, since a strong wind could theoretically cause this effect. Yet, the fact that such an event is unprecedented and occurred precisely when Moses extended his staff confirms that this was no coincidence, but an act of God.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Basinger suggests similar classifications. A miracle is either: (1) an unexplainable event directly caused by God, or (2) an impressive, yet explainable event directly caused by God.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The distinction between miracles of the “second class” and “special providence” can be blurry. We might clarify the question by calling “special providence” a typical natural event occurring in an atypical fashion, i.e. in a time and manner directed by God. A “second class miracle,” however, could theoretically occur spontaneously in nature, but is without precedent. Nevertheless, drawing a distinction between these items is not critical as long as we acknowledge them to be acts of God.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Werner Schaaffs introduces an intriguing observation into this discussion.[[15]](#footnote-15) Schaaffs draws attention to the fact that science recognizes certain unpredictable outcomes, especially on the atomic level. Although the mass effect of atoms is predictable, no one can predict how a particular atom may perform at any specific time. This uncertainty in atomic and molecular action is known in the world of science as Heisenberg's Indeterminacy Principle. Therefore, as Pollard notes, all “laws” of nature are based on probability.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In light of this observation, Schaaffs proposes that when a miracle takes place, God is acting on the atomic level and directing these unpredictable elements in such a way as to produce an unusual outcome, i.e., a “miracle.” For Schaaffs, then, God is not violating natural laws in performing miracles, but rather manipulating these unpredictable elements to produce His desired effect. Schaaffs writes,

Physics cannot rule out, and must in fact accept, the possibility that a good force (God) or an evil force (the Devil) intervenes to provoke an atomic reaction without in any sense doing violence to natural law.[[17]](#footnote-17)

In our definition of miracles above, we stated that in them the Lord is seeking to accomplish a certain goal. This may consist of bringing Himself glory, meeting human need, or confirming a certain truth.[[18]](#footnote-18) Augustine added the thought that all phenomena in nature should direct our minds to the Lord. At the same time, miracles are especially effective toward that end. Augustine believed that miracles have a “resultant power to direct the mind and allegiance of otherwise indifferent or unconvinced people to God.”[[19]](#footnote-19) John Hick agrees that a miracle should lead us “to become vividly and immediately conscious of God as acting toward us.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Wittgenstein spoke of miracles as “God’s gesture.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

Miracles demonstrate the supernatural character of salvation.[[22]](#footnote-22) Helm considers miracles to be a sign of grace, which appear in special periods in the history of redemption. An extreme view in this regard is the rejection of the existence of miracles today, a view held by some believers in God.

On the one hand, we concur that miracles happen more frequently in certain periods in the history of redemption. The Bible confirms this claim. However, if God ceased His supernatural work altogether, then the regeneration of the repentant sinner would be impossible as well, since that is God’s greatest miracle in the personal life of an individual. In addition, even the more “ordinary” gifts in the Church, like the pastor, teacher, or deacon, require God’s supernatural enablement.

Nevertheless, some contemporary theologians insist that certain spiritual gifts, for instance, speaking in tongues, healing the sick and other more “dramatic” gifts, ceased to operate after the apostolic age. This position is discussed and refuted in the fifth volume of this series in our discussion on spiritual gifts.

Atheists categorically rule out the existence of miracles, operating on the worldview “ontological naturalism.”[[23]](#footnote-23) According to this perspective, only the material world exists, and all events coincide with natural laws and processes. This is contrasted with “methodological naturalism,” which also acknowledges the laws of nature, but does not rule out the existence of God or His activity in the world.

We will examine arguments from well-known thinkers who completely reject the supernatural. We can begin with the 18th century English philosopher David Hume. His primary argument proceeds as follows. First, a miracle by definition is a violation of a natural law or an exception from it. Second, natural laws are based on probability. In other words, if something regularly occurs, then we speak of it as a natural law. Third, if natural laws are based on *high* probability, this makes the occurrence of a miracle *im*probable. Furthermore, in Hume’s opinion, a wise individual always anticipates the result that has the highest probability. Therefore, he concludes that a wise person will not expect or believe in miracles.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Hume approaches his conclusion from a different point of view as well. Claims to miracles are based on personal testimony, that is, on human experience. Natural laws are also based on experience, namely scientific research and observation. Miracles are usually witnessed by a small number of people – possibly only one individual. On the other hand, natural laws enjoy confirmation by many witnesses. Therefore, whom should we believe: the many or the few? Hume states, “It is experience only, which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience, which assures us of the laws of nature.”[[25]](#footnote-25) Additionally, one can always verify the testimony to natural laws, but verifying a miracle that reportedly happened in the past is not possible.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Our response to Hume is as follows. First, if we view the world from a theistic perspective, then the occurrence of miracles cannot be ruled out. God is not limited by natural processes. Almighty God can do as He pleases, including displaying supernatural power. Purtill concurs that natural laws can “be suspended, temporarily, for a particular purpose, by the creator of nature.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

Second, we define a miracle as a rarely occurring event. Consequently, Hume’s claim that the occurrence of a miracle is improbable fully agrees with what one would expect from a miracle. If miracles happened often, they would not be miracles, but typical natural processes. Therefore, we must investigate each miracle claim individually based on its merits. Even a miracle disproved in one instance gives no grounds for rejecting all subsequent miracle claims. The Lord can perform a miracle at any time.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In addition, the fact that a certain event is unprecedented in history does not force the conclusion that it could not have occurred. The fact that no one has ever walked on Mars does not mean that such a thing could never occur.[[29]](#footnote-29) Those who follow Hume’s thinking here must deny that any new discovery, scientific or otherwise, could ever take place.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Another argument of Hume’s consists of the observation that various religions appeal to miracles to support their doctrines. Yet, these doctrines differ from one another. Therefore, miracles cannot substantiate any one of them. The weakness in Hume’s argument here, however, is that he grossly generalizes his observations. It is certainly defendable that various religions can claim supernatural phenomena. Yet, one must take into consideration the quantity and qualify of these acts of power. If one religion can substantiate more frequent and more powerful miracles in comparison to others, then that religion deserves more serious consideration.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Finally, here is another attempt by Hume:

There is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusions in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and is so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Yet, can Hume dictate to the Lord when, where, and among whom He must perform a wonder? By these criteria, we must also disallow the great majority of historical data as well. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that miracles actually meet these criteria better than Hume thinks. Biblical authors and heroes were people of the highest moral quality. Their teachings and examples are foundational for ethical systems worldwide. Hume, however, accuses them of either intentional deception or psychological instability.

Hume also undervalues the price that the disciples of Jesus paid for their testimony of the life, death, and resurrection of their Lord. According to church tradition, most of the twelve apostles met with horrific martyrdoms. Who would endure such torture to maintain claims that one knows full well to be fabricated?

Anthony Flew advanced the assertion that history must be interpreted in the light of typical human experience, that is, what people experience today. We are able to verify only those events that we can observe, not those of the past.[[33]](#footnote-33) However, Flew’s argument is unsubstantial. Many events of the past do not repeat in the present. Every competent historian operates on the testimony of those who lived at that time, working with whatever evidences are available.

Moreover, Flew asserts that believers in miracles interpret unique happenings in support of the religious systems they represent. Therefore, their conclusions are invalid. On the other hand, it is natural to expect that believers in the miraculous would use such testimony in their favor. Would not those who dispute the reality of miracles also interpret the same data in such a way as to refute the existence of the supernatural? Does this not invalidate their conclusions? Believers in God are not the only ones to employ historical data to their advantage.

Flew, together with Alastair McKinnon, advanced still another objection to miracles. They argued that natural laws do not proscribe, but instead describe happenings in nature. Therefore, it is impossible to “violate” natural laws since they are only descriptive of what actually happens in nature. If one encounters a “miracle,” one must simply adapt one’s description of natural laws to accommodate it.[[34]](#footnote-34)

However, as Purtill notes, this is merely an attempt to deny miracles by employing a more “flexible” definition of natural law.[[35]](#footnote-35) If we can include in our definition of natural laws things that clearly contradict those laws, such as a resurrection from the dead, then what value is there in acknowledging natural laws? Even in his “unenlightened” era, Augustine was able to distinguish natural from supernatural processes.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Furthermore, Basinger correctly states that natural laws are established to describe not all natural phenomena, but those that occur regularly and predictably.[[37]](#footnote-37) Moreover, he argues that natural laws “only state what will occur under certain natural conditions,” and, “They cannot be used to predict or explain what will happen when nonnatural forces are present.”[[38]](#footnote-38) In other words, if God acts in a supernatural way, then such an event defies description by natural laws, since they can only predict what will happen under normal circumstances. Yet, a miracle by definition occurs under atypical circumstances.

McKinnon and Flew also fail to notice that when an unusual event occurs in nature, we are obliged to seek out an explanation for it. Whether we call that a “miracle” or not is irrelevant. If the most plausible explanation for that outcome is a supernatural intervention by a supernatural power, then it serves as evidence for the existence of such a power, whatever we choose to name it. By their reasoning, McKinnon and Flew do not exclude the existence of miracles at all, but merely designate them by different terms.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The theory of McKinnon and Flew also encounters a problem in trying to “adjust” nature laws in a way to include supernatural acts.[[40]](#footnote-40) Under what conditions might one predict that the Red Sea is going to part again? A more reasonable approach is to affirm that natural laws predict only regular, repeatable events. Miracles, however, are unpredictable, and are therefore exceptions to natural law.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Flew responds to this objection by saying that we can “adjust” natural laws only if the event in question can potentially repeat. He completely rejects the idea of a non-repeatable outcome.[[42]](#footnote-42) In so doing, though, he undermines his own theory, which claims that we can “adjust” natural laws to accommodate *all* unusual activity in nature.

Flew also challenges the claim that God is behind miraculous events. He believes that we can verify a claim only based on what we have on hand to work with, that is, natural laws and processes. If an atypical event occurs, how can we verify that its origin was in God? He concludes that one must *assume* that existence of God and *assume* that one knows His will before a miracle can be ascribed to Him.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The weakness in Flew’s thinking here is his faulty epistemology, i.e., theory of knowledge.” He reasons that if we cannot discern what natural processes caused an event, then we cannot determine its cause at all. However, in a healthy epistemology, we take into consideration not only empirical evidence, but logical evidences and other proofs. Basinger adds that personal testimony is also acceptable as proof, as well as the physical alteration caused by the miracle.[[44]](#footnote-44)

For example, even if we are not able to explain in scientific terms how Peter and John healed a crippled man (Acts chp. 3), the fact that they predicted this unpredictable feat, which was impossible for humans alone to achieve, and performed it in the name of Jesus Christ, leads to only one logical conclusion – the God of Christianity performed a miracle.

A final objection to miracles concerns the “problem of evil.” If God indeed does do the supernatural, then why does He not supernaturally intervene more often? This will be the topic of chapter 19.

**4. Conclusions**

Concerning the miraculous, two sources are possible. If it is truly a supernatural phenomenon, then it must originate from a supernatural source – either God or the Devil. Consequently, we must test miracles to see if they are from God. The Bible testifies that Satan can perform false signs and wonders:

If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,” you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for Yahweh your God is testing you to find out if you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut 13:1-3).

Finally, we observe two extremes in the approach to the miraculous. On the one side, liberal theologians feel that God works exclusively through natural processes and human effort. On the other side, some more “charismatic” figures may rely on God exclusively for miracles instead of employing natural means.

Carl Henry proposes a healthy balance between these extremes. He writes, “God’s transcendence means that nature is always and everywhere open to his purpose, a purpose that he expresses freely either in repetitive cosmic processes and events, or in once-for-all acts. Hence God discloses his purposive presence equally in both the regularities of nature and in what is exceptional or miraculous.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Bowne concurs that we can “find God as present in the ordinary movements of life and society as in the strange and uninterpretable things.”[[46]](#footnote-46)

Bowne also makes an important point concerning the operation of general providence, that is, the regular operation of natural laws.[[47]](#footnote-47) If God continually acted in supernatural ways, then life would lose in predictability and stability. We would not know what to expect from moment to moment. Under such conditions, it would be impossible to live a normal life and make decisions with confidence. Too many miracles “paralyzes intelligence and makes men afraid to move because of some threatening superstition.”[[48]](#footnote-48)

On the other hand, McConnell affirms that miracles are also necessary, because through them our attention is especially drawn to God and we find solutions to difficult problems. In addition, miracles accentuate special happenings in the Lord’s overall plan.[[49]](#footnote-49)

1. Aquinas T. *Summa Сontra Gentiles*, 3.101. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lewis C. S. Miracles. – London: Geoffrey Bles, 1947. – P. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Purtill R. L. Defining Miracles // Geivett R. D., Habermas G. R. In Defense of Miracles. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1997. – P. 62-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Helm P. The Providence of God. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1993. – P. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Aquinas T. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3.99. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Langford M. J. Providence. – London: SCM Press, 1981. – P. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bowne B. P. The Immanence of God. – Boston, MA; New York, NY: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1905. – P. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Ex 20:2; 29:46; Lev 25:38; Deut 16:3; Josh 24:17; Judg 2:12; 1 Kin 9:9; Jer 11:4; Ezek 20:9; Dan 9:15 and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Erickson M. J. Christian Theology. – Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983. – V. 1 – P. 408. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Geisler N. L. Christian Apologetics. - Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1976. – P. 281. Basinger makes an important qualification that we may not be able to recognize a true miracle initially, until we better understand God’s plan and what purpose He is pursuing in it (see Basinger D., Basinger R. Philosophy and Miracle: The Contemporary Debate. – Lewiston; Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986. – P. 22). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Thomas Aquinas created similar categories. First class miracles are natural impossibilities, such as stopping the motion of the sun. Second class miracles are theoretically possible in nature, but not in the fashion that the miracle event occurred, like raising the dead. Third class miracles are typical natural events, but take place at God’s command, such as Elijah’s prayer for rain (*Summa Сontra Gentiles*, 3.101). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Geisler, p. 277-279. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Basinger, p. 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A certain danger exists in calling an event an act of special providence or a second class miracle, since one may exaggerate the event, which may have simply been an coincidental occurrence (see Basinger, p. 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Schaaffs W. Theology, Physics and Miracles / trans. Renfield R. L. – Washington: Canon Press, 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Pollard W. G. Chance and Providence. – New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958. – P. 38, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Schaaffs, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. We reject the so-called “non-teleological conception of miracles,” where it is claimed that miracles need not always serve a concrete purpose. All miracles in the Bible contradict this view. We embrace, rather, the “teleological conception of miracles” (see Corner D. The Philosophy of Miracles. – London; New York: Continuum, 2007. – P. 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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21. Corner, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Helm, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
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24. Geisler, p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Hume D. The Philosophy of Miracles // Geivett R. D., Habermas G. R. In Defense of Miracles. – Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1997. – P. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Noted in Basinger, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Purtill, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., p. 65-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Basinger, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Hume, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
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36. Houston, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Basinger, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., p. 39-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Advanced by Ninian Smart and Richard Swinburne, noted in Corner, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Corner, p. 22-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
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