

## Do Miracles Really Happen?

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People offer many reasons to doubt miracles.

A person who does not believe that God exists (an atheist) would not believe that miracles are possible, since miracles are by definition special acts of God. Even many who do claim a belief in God do not fully acknowledge God's interactions in the world today. Such people are like the deists from years ago, who said that God exists and that He expects us to live a good life, but otherwise they regard God as largely disconnected from daily life. Miracles are not quite impossible according to deists, but they are very unlikely. Finally, even many Christians who acknowledge the miracles mentioned in the Bible doubt that miracles still happen today.

The question about whether miracles happen depends partly upon how one defines "miracle." The Old Testament refers often to "miracles," "signs," and "wonders," particularly with reference to the amazing acts Moses performed in the presence of Pharaoh. Similar phrasing is found in the New Testament regarding the astonishing acts of Jesus and, later, of His apostles. The church father Augustine (about four centuries after Christ) and the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (in the 1200s AD) helpfully distinguished two senses of "miracle." Any event that seems astonishing to a person is a "miracle" in the *subjective* sense. When something happens outside the ordinary course of nature, it is a miracle in the *objective* sense.

Even an atheist would admit that amazing things happen—the subjective sense of "miracle." The debate centers on the objective sense of "miracle" as a supernatural event. Is there more to reality than just natural causes? Are there some events that would be impossible without God? If so, then the observed occurrence of such an event would be evidence of God's existence. That's why atheists and agnostics resist acknowledging the reality of objective miracles.

But faithful Christians also have good reasons to beware of miraculous claims. Jesus Himself warned concerning our own time: "False christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." (Matthew 24:24) The Apostle Paul similarly

cautioned against "the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10) The Book of Revelation likewise foretold of Satan's representative as using astonishing signs to mislead people. (Revelation 13:14)

So, ironically, the Christian and the atheist have something in common: a very reasonable desire not to be suckered into believing in miracles.

What makes the Christian's confidence in biblical miracles defensible is not some trite belief that "miracles happen everyday" but rather a much firmer foundation of knowledge: eyewitness testimony that those particular miracles happened on those particular days. Nor do miracles just happen at random. Rather, well-attested miracles happen to settle a controversy by certifying an important truth. Miracles establish not merely that God exists, but also who the true God is.

Eyewitness testimony of the miraculous sea crossing in Exodus substantiated Rahab's conviction that the God of Israel truly is God. (Joshua 2:10) Nicodemus's personal observation of the miraculous signs Christ performed proved that Jesus had been sent from God. (John 3:2) Hearing the Father's voice from heaven and seeing Jesus transfigured into a glorious form revealed to Peter and his fellow disciples that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. (2 Peter 1:18)

Although many people observed Christ's death on the cross, including Roman soldiers who specialized in executing prisoners, over five hundred people saw Him alive in the weeks that followed. (1 Corinthians 15:6) This well-attested resurrection miracle signals to the world that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of all people.

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