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## Miracles: True and False

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#### Introduction

Interest in miracles reviving in recent years.  
Especially interest, in contrast to my own college days at Duke, 1959-63.  
We see a resurgence of the occult also.  
Perhaps the experiences of Carlos Castaneda have been influential.

#### Definition of Miracle

Do we properly define “miracle” as a “violation of natural law”?  
It is true that a miracle is thought of as something that doesn’t naturally happen.  
But how do we know it *violates* natural law?  
Does a human action (say, picking up a pencil) violate natural law?

How well do we understand the universe?  
Sub-atomic level (an epistemological floor w/ events penetrating it)  
Cosmological level (time before the big-bang; space beyond telescope range)  
Local level (space curvature & its implications re/ more than three spatial dimensions)  
Human level (cybernetics & the problem of a machine initiating an action; consciousness & integration of stimuli; out-of-body experiences)

A suggested definition:  
Based on NT terms for miracle: δύναμις, θαυμα, σημειον  
(act of power, marvel, sign)  
A miracle is a highly unusual event or combination of events which purports to be the result of personal interaction with natural phenomena by means which transcend known physical laws.

#### Do Miracles Occur?

Some arguments against miracles:  
Deductive: *reduction ad absurdum*: based on miracle defined as violation of natural law vs God as lawful.  
Inductive:  
Hume (*Concerning Human Understanding*, §10): uniform experience against miracle, so accept any natural explanation first.

Harnack (*What is Christianity*, 24-25): ancients expected miracles, didn't understand nature.

Bultmann (*Jesus Christ & Mythology*, 15): universe is a closed system of cause and effect.

Evidence for the miraculous:

Uniform human experience is *not* against the miraculous!

Miracles reported in every culture & age.

Yet nature is scientifically reliable.

A general tendency for miracles to be done "in a corner."

But not universally so:

e.g., Fatima, 13 Oct 1917, seen by 70,000 people

Do one right here?

Sorry! God's general procedure is to remain silent (Ps 50:3, 21).

Fulfillment of prophecy: some examples

- (1) Babylon deserted (Jer 51:42-43)
- (2) Idols of Memphis disappear (Ezk 30:13)
- (3) Tyre's dust scraped up & thrown in sea (Ezk 26:4, 12)
- (4) Israel's future (Hos 3:4-5)
- (5) Time of Messiah (Gen 49:10; Dan 9:24-27)
- (6) Light to Gentiles (Isa 49:6)
- (7) Israel regathered (Isa 11:11ff)
- (8) Jeconiah cursed (Jer 22:30)
- (9) Control of Jerusalem (Luke 21:24)
- (10) Status of Temple (Matt 24:2; 2 Thess 2:4)
- (11) Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida (Matt 11:20-24)
- (12) Moral conditions of last days (2 Tim 3:1-5)
- (13) NT model of Messiah (see my paper)
- (14) Christ buried (Isa 53:9)

## True & False Miracles

Two possible distinctions can be involved in these terms:

#	True	False	Comment
1	Really miraculous	Not really miraculous	Not all strange events are miraculous.
2	Good guide	Misleading	Re/ meaning of life

Therefore, we need to be able to test miracles.

But how?

For #1, use knowledge of nature, but may well be mistaken;  
will probably have numerous borderline cases.

For #2, Bible indicates this problem exists, gives important tests:

Recall Moses & magicians (Exodus 7 and 8)  
Antichrist (2 Thessalonians 2:9)

1 John 4:1 – try the spirits

The tests:

- (1) No failures:
  - Prophecy (Deut 18:20-21)
  - Miraculous acts (1 Kings 18, esp. vv 21, 37)
- (2) Same God (Deut 13:1ff; 1 John 4:1-2)
- (3) Same Gospel (Gal 1:6-9)

## Conclusions

Life is dangerous; we have to make many decisions which have long-range consequences; some such decisions cannot be avoided; remember Pascal's wager.

Two foolish errors here:

- (1) To deny the miraculous because you don't like the kind of world in which such would exist.
- (2) To accept the miraculous without any concern whether all that is miraculous is on the side of good.

This is far too important a decision to leave to others to make for you.