

# 1 DO MIRACLES STILL HAPPEN TODAY?

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## **IN THIS LESSON YOU WILL STUDY THESE QUESTIONS:**

- What are miracles?
  - What is the purpose of miracles?
  - Who is eligible to receive a miracle?
  - What is the greatest of all miracles that can happen?
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## **SOMETHING TO CONSIDER**

Having lived seven years in the Canary Islands (seven small but lovely volcanic islands off the northwest coast of Africa), I have flown in and out of the Los Rodeos airport on the island of Tenerife many times. As the plane approaches the airport from the west, the shimmering Atlantic Ocean stretches underneath. Boats of all kinds—ferries, container ships, and sailboats—dot the blue surface. Tenerife’s twelve-thousand-foot-high volcano called Teide looms ahead. Soon the coastal region of the island is in full view, and the plane flies by pine-covered mountain ridges, over the capital city of Santa Cruz, and finally lands on a high plateau. The view is breathtakingly beautiful. However, on cloudy days the approach can be somewhat tense. At times low clouds completely engulf the airport, reducing visibility to nearly zero. It has made me wonder how planes could land or take off in such conditions.

On my flights to and from the airport, I could not help but be reminded that it was the site of the deadliest aircraft collision in history. At about 5:00 p.m. local time on March 27, 1977, two Boeing 747 airliners loaded with tourists collided on the runway of Los Rodeos Airport. One of the planes was already traveling 180 mph, nearly ready to take off. Only 68

people survived out of 651 who were on board the two jumbo jets. One of the fortunate passengers was Norman Williams.

I heard Norman talk about his amazing escape from the flames and carnage. He said that after the collision, everyone in his area was either dead or dying except for one or two people. Even the man who had been sitting next to him was gone. There were explosions, flames, and hurling debris all around him. He saw one white-hot object headed directly toward him and instinctively threw up his arms to protect himself. Amazingly, almost as though he were Superman, he deflected it. Then he spotted a jagged hole in the ceiling of the plane. Even though he was a six-foot, non-athletic, 250 lb. middle-aged man, he found himself able to leap high enough to grab the edges of the opening and pull himself through with no help. He then slid down onto the wing of the plane and jumped to the ground. His only injuries were cuts and burns to his hands. Norman Williams attributes his survival to a miracle. In fact, he remembers feeling utter peace during the whole ordeal.<sup>1</sup>

## DO YOU NEED A MIRACLE?

If you are like most people, you probably would welcome a miracle or two in your own life. Who wouldn't? Maybe you or someone you know is suffering with illness. Perhaps you have severe financial needs or are unemployed. It is possible that you face real dangers and need divine protection. In this chapter we will consider four questions: (1) What are miracles? (2) What is the purpose of miracles? (3) Who can receive a miracle? (4) What is the greatest miracle that could happen to you?

## WHAT ARE MIRACLES?

Maybe you consider finding a good parking place for your car a miracle. I have been tempted to think that in certain congested cities I have visited. In Spanish-speaking countries, many women are named *Milagros*, which means "miracles." Perhaps you think of the long-awaited birth of a baby as a miraculous occurrence. For some, paying all their monthly bills on time seems like a miracle. Some described the first manned spaceflight to the moon as nothing short of miraculous. No doubt each of these examples represents a wonderful event, but are they miracles?

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<sup>1</sup> George Otis and Norman Williams, *Terror at Tenerife* (Van Nuys, CA: Bible Voice, Inc., 1977), 1–10.

## Real Miracles

Generally, we think of miracles as wonders or supernatural signs that can be attributed only to God. They are demonstrations of divine power, mercy, and compassion. Did you know that the Bible talks about miracles from cover to cover? Some miracles affected nature, like the parting of the Red Sea for the ancient Israelites and Jesus' calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee. There are also miracles of divine enablement, such as when God helped a shepherd boy called David, armed with only a sling and some stones, to defeat a huge battle-hardened Philistine warrior. Other miracles directly affected the lives of individuals in need, such as when Jesus gave sight to the blind, healed lepers, and restored mobility to those who were paralyzed or crippled.

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## False Miracles

Throughout history and right up to the present time, people have claimed to have experienced miracles. Unfortunately, some miraculous claims are merely products of a huge imagination. Misguided people have attempted to prove God's existence because His name "miraculously appeared" in the markings on an eggshell or in a cloud formation or because the shape of a tree resembled that of a man praying. Other miraculous claims are actually hoaxes that eventually prove false. However, some miraculous claims are much harder to dismiss—like the story at the beginning of this chapter.

In many cases, people have been spared from serious injury or death through very unusual circumstances or should have died long ago from a terminal illness but did not. Cases of angelic intervention and help abound. An objective person who is convinced that a loving, all-powerful, and all-knowing God exists cannot ignore the possibility that He is still doing miracles in the world today.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF MIRACLES?

Even though God is not obligated to do miracles, the Bible and personal experience support the idea that God cares about people and intervenes in their lives. He listens to their prayers. He sees their needs.

After all, God is the Creator. Making humankind was God's idea in the first place. We did not simply evolve from lower life-forms such as amoebas, reptiles, or monkeys. It is only logical that this same Creator God would demonstrate His interest in the lives of the people He made. When Jesus, God's eternal Son, visited the earth two thousand years ago, He performed incredible miracles. St. John wrote, "There was much else that Jesus did; if it were written down in detail, I do not suppose the world itself would hold all the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

While we may not experience a miracle every day, it is certainly within the realm of possibility that the God who made you and loves you deeply would do something incredible in your life.

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## WHO CAN RECEIVE A MIRACLE?

Do only very good or religious people experience miracles in their lives? No. If that were so, few people, if anyone, would be eligible. You could search the whole world to try to find a perfect man or woman, but you would fail. Even the most upright and revered people cannot deny their need of God's forgiveness. The Bible says, "If we say, 'We have no sin,' we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth has no place in us" (1 John 1:8). Pope John Paul II, one of the most admired and loved of all popes, commented on the problem of priests who sin, saying, "God alone is the source of holiness, and it is to Him . . . that we must turn for forgiveness, for healing and for the grace to meet this challenge with uncompromising courage and harmony of purpose."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cathedral of St. Raymond, "When Priests Sin," Pope John Paul Speaks: Notable Quotations from Pope John Paul II and Official Teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, <http://www.rc.net/joliet/straymond/pulpit/pope-3/htm#sin> (accessed January 24, 2006).

were perfect. It appears that the only prerequisites for a miracle are that you have a need and that you focus your trust in the one true God.

## **WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE GOD TO DO FOR YOU?**

### **Provide a Happy Family?**

Many people around the world grow up in very difficult circumstances, such as poverty, abuse, divorce, crime, drugs, alcoholism, and so forth. It is no surprise that many in such situations wish to eventually find someone special to whom they can commit their lives and love—someone with whom they can spend a lifetime and raise a happy family. They may even ask God for His help in this area and look forward to a special miracle.

I know a married couple who longed to have their first child, but the young lady could not conceive. Not only that, she did not feel well anymore and suffered with fevers and bleeding. After medical tests, doctors found that her uterus was filled with fibroid tumors. Sadly, the physicians recommended a hysterectomy. It was a severe blow to both husband and wife who longed to know the joy and responsibility of parenting. They began to pray fervently, asking God for a miracle. Many months went by with no change, but they kept praying for God to intervene. Then, strangely, one day the young woman felt different. On a follow-up visit to her doctor and after medical tests, it was discovered that all her tumors were gone and that she was pregnant. Months later, she gave birth to a perfectly healthy baby boy. The doctors have no explanation for what happened. I would call that a miracle.

Yet psychologists and even common sense tell us that it is unfair to expect a man, a woman, or even your own child to fulfill all your needs and wishes. Why? No person alive is capable of that. What I mean is, even if you are perfect (which you are not), your mate is inevitably going to have his or her own set of needs. Your children will have to deal with challenges of all kinds and have needs too. So, while families are great, they do not assure total contentment or joy.

### **No Financial Worries?**

Some think the greatest thing that could ever happen to them would be to never have a financial or material worry again. Many people spend a great deal of money on gambling, lottery tickets, and bets, hoping to win and put

an end to their needs. In fact, it is not uncommon for some gamblers to pray for a “miracle” before making a bet or buying a lottery ticket. They also make promises about the good things they will do if they win.

Is God against wealth? Not necessarily. Can He supply our needs miraculously? Of course. When Jesus was on earth, He multiplied a small amount of bread and fish and fed a huge multitude of five thousand men plus women and children. The Bible teaches that God knows all about our needs and can supply them according to His riches. Sometimes the way He provides for us is truly miraculous.

However, God is against us making money an idol. That is, when we start loving money or anything material more than God or people, there is a problem! Contrary to popular opinion, having wealth does not always guarantee that a person “lives happily ever after.” It is interesting to note that some people who win large amounts of money squander it quickly and end up far worse than before they became rich. I personally know a man in Spain who won a sizeable amount of money in the lottery. However, because of his unwise investments with his winnings, he lost it all and ended up owing more money than he did before he won the lottery prize.

The following are true stories from the United States of America: When Ken, a machinist, won \$1 million in the lottery, he decided to go into the car business with his brothers. Within five years, the money was all gone, and he had to file for bankruptcy. Two years after winning \$3.1 million in 1989, another man, Willie, was not only out of money but also charged with murder. According to his lawyer, Willie spent his fortune on drugs and a divorce. A woman named Janite won \$18 million in 1993 and generously gave to many political, educational, and community causes. But Janite filed for bankruptcy eight years later with only \$700 in the bank and no cash.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, not everyone can handle wealth. Maybe we should rethink whether getting rich would really be the greatest miracle.

### **Provide Good Health?**

My son was born with a physical handicap (one of his hands never formed in the womb), and when he was a boy, he struggled at times, wishing he had two complete hands. Sometimes he told other kids that

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen Goodstein, “8 Lottery Winners Who Lost Their Millions,” MSN Money, <http://moneycentral.msn.com/content/Savinganddebt/Savemoney/P99649.asp> (accessed January 24, 2006).

a shark bit off his missing hand. Later we discovered that he also had a learning disability. My son is not alone in dealing with handicaps. In fact, many people struggle with disabilities, illness, and pain. Some think that receiving healing would be the greatest of all miracles.

Certainly, the Bible encourages us to present all our needs to God in prayer, including our desire for physical health. A man I work with, Willard, contracted polio in 1950 at the age of eight. He became paralyzed in his neck, back, and left leg. His concerned parents took him from one hospital to the next for treatment. Then, on one of the trips, they stopped in a town where a religious service was being held in a tent and a minister was praying for sick people. Willard said that as the preacher prayed for him, he felt something like an electric current run through his body. From that moment on, all pain and paralysis left him. He was still kept under observation for two weeks, yet to this day, over fifty years later, no trace of polio has ever been found. Never discount what God can do!

However, please allow me to add that as wonderful as good health and a fully functioning body might be, some of the world's greatest achievers were and are people with serious physical impairments. Do not think of your life as inferior to another just because you may have a handicap. For example, Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882–1945) suffered with polio but was elected President of the United States for four terms. At age 46, Francisco de Goya (1746–1828) became deaf yet went on to create the most famous Spanish art of the nineteenth century. John Milton (1608–1674) was an English author and poet. He became blind at age 43, but that did not stop him from creating his most famous epic, *Paradise Lost*. The famous German composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) wrote some of his best music after becoming deaf. Stephen Hawking (b. 1942), one of the most brilliant physicists and mathematicians of our time, is confined to a wheelchair and needs a computer to speak due to Lou Gehrig's Disease. Famous singer and composer Ray Charles (1930–2004) was blind by age seven due to glaucoma. These physically challenged achievers actually accomplished more than many individuals who never suffered with physical problems.

### **An Even Greater Miracle Than Family, Riches, and Health**

I hope you understand that God is able to do great things in your life. He can do more than you can ask or imagine because He is mighty and

really loves you. However, let me suggest that there is a miracle even greater than a having a happy family, possessing enough wealth to meet all your needs, or obtaining excellent health. That is what the rest of this book is all about. The greatest miracle is this: to experience the gift of forgiveness and eternal life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

In light of eternity, nothing else compares to this miracle. One split second after you die, it will not matter how much fulfillment your family brought to your earthly life or how much money you managed to stash away or whether you enjoyed great health. The only thing that will really matter is whether you had a relationship with Jesus Christ leading to forgiveness. On the night Jesus was betrayed and arrested, He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. He said, “Father, the hour has come: glorify your Son so that your Son may glorify you; so that, just as you have given him power over all humanity, he may give eternal life to all those you have entrusted to him. And eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:1-3).

You may go to confession regularly and attend Mass every Sunday, pray the rosary, and take communion faithfully. Or, you may be someone

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that is not very religious. In either case, you may feel like Jesus Christ is very far from you. You know about Him, but you do not know Him experientially. Friend, I assure you that it is possible to have a relationship with Jesus and experience the power of His love and mercy. You can have confidence that you are going to heaven someday. By the end of this short book, you will see clearly what to do and why from a biblical point of view. Interested? Curious? I invite you to discover the amazing reality of personally knowing Jesus Christ.



## THE GREATEST MIRACLE

### **Questions for individual or group study:**

1. *Think back. Is there evidence that God has helped you in time of need or performed a miracle in your life?*
2. *How can you tell the difference between real and false miracles?*
3. *Why do some people flatly reject any possibility of miracles happening?*
4. *Do you agree with the author that the greatest miracle is knowing Jesus Christ and experiencing the gift of eternal life?*

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