



# **Miracles Just Happen Like That**

***A Defense  
of Miracles***

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Cover photo by Steve Harnes of the empty garden tomb,  
not far from Golgotha.

All scripture quotations are from the King James translation  
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## **Introduction**

### *1 Corinthians 15:1-9*

Some believe in the possibility of miracles, while others attempt to find natural explanations for these rare and seemingly unexplainable events. This paper is intended to demonstrate the potential and validity of miracles in light of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection of Christ is the foundational and most fundamental tenant of Christianity. Without the sensational and miraculous event of the Resurrection of Christ, Jesus would be dead, Christianity would not exist, and there would be no future hope for humanity.

In fundamental and straightforward terms, I propose that Jesus being seen alive after death is a miracle. The premise and goal of this paper is to offer credible evidence and meticulous reasoning articulating the Resurrection of Christ as a miracle that occurred in history. With this consideration, what is a miracle?

## **What is a Miracle?**

Christian author and believer in Christ, Richard Purtell, defines miracles as: "an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is

acting."<sup>1</sup> This definition helps distinguish a true miracle from a mere unusual occurrence or an unnatural but not necessarily supernatural event. The event being examined must defy the "natural order" of how things are typically and demonstrate that God is acting above that "natural order." Since God is the One Who created this world and all the natural processes, it makes sense that He is also the One Who can supersede the nature and order He created. Considering miracles from another vantage point, miracle skeptic and nonbeliever David Hume says,

Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happens in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard L. Purtill, "Defining Miracles," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas (IVP Academic, 1997), 62–63.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 64–65.

David Hume believes a resurrection would be a miracle, but because no one has seen a resurrection, there can't be a resurrection. This statement implies that a resurrection would be a miracle, but only if there are other resurrections to prove that a resurrection is possible. This circular reasoning denies what could truly validate a miracle in that it is an extremely rare event that may not be replicated and certainly not repeated within the natural order of this earth. Contrary to the thought that no one has witnessed a resurrection, historical, theological, and archaeological evidence demonstrates a resurrection.

Gary Habermas comments on the Resurrection: "My position is that Jesus's resurrection is best considered a historical event of the past."<sup>3</sup> From 1 Corinthians 15, this paper will demonstrate that Jesus being alive after his death is a miracle and miracles really happen like that.

Further, distinguish for a moment the magic considered "sleight of hand" in contrast to a supernatural miracle. In this example, a ball is under a cup, and the movement of three cups spinning around on a table may be quicker than the eye; the ball may seemingly disappear. That is the magic of the sleight of hand. In this form of magic,

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<sup>3</sup> Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), viii.

a coin appears from behind an ear, and a rabbit pops out of a hat. These are exciting events that occur with natural and skillful actions. Then, there is the occultic or demonic magic. This magic is also much different than a God-wrought miracle. Author David Clark helpfully articulates,

"But Jesus' works (including especially his encounters with demonic spirits) are unlike magic in that he performed miracles by his own power and authority. In biblical miracles, God graciously responded to requests for supernatural help. By contrast, magic generally involves manipulation of spiritual, perhaps demonic, forces. From a Christian viewpoint, it is best to interpret demonic acts as supernormal but natural events, since demons are part of the natural order that God created. We will assume, therefore, that miracles and magic are conceptually distinct."<sup>4</sup>

## **1. Jesus Died, and His Death is Attested by All. Vs. 1-4.**

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<sup>4</sup> David K. Clark, "Miracles in the World Religions," in *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, ed. R. Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas (IVP Academic, 1997), 201.

Many valid historical documents attest the death of Jesus Christ and virtually all modern scholars agree that Jesus died by crucifixion at the hands of the Romans at the prompting of the Hebrew Temple leaders. Christian and miracle apologist, Gary Habermas notes, "One of the most popular approaches to historical Jesus studies is to begin with a list of historical facts that are admitted to by virtually all researchers."<sup>5</sup>

Habermas presents what he calls "Minimal Facts" that are central to the death of Jesus and that nearly everyone believes took place. These historical facts agreed upon by liberal or conservative scholars and skeptics of Jesus or believers in Jesus are listed below.

1. Jesus died by Roman crucifixion.
2. He was buried, most likely in a private tomb.
3. Soon afterward, the disciples were discouraged, bereaved, and despondent, having lost hope.
4. Jesus's tomb was found empty very soon after his interment.
5. The disciples had experiences that they believed were actual appearances of the risen Jesus.

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<sup>5</sup> Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 8–9.



6. Due to these experiences, the disciples' lives were thoroughly transformed, even being willing to die for this belief.
7. The proclamation of the Resurrection took place very early, at the beginning of church history.
8. The disciples' public testimony and preaching of the Resurrection took place in the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had been crucified and buried shortly before.
9. The Gospel message centered on the death and Resurrection of Jesus.
10. Sunday was the primary day for gathering and worshipping.
11. James, the brother of Jesus and a former skeptic, was converted when, he believed, he saw the risen Jesus.
12. Just a few years later, Saul of Tarsus (Paul) became a Christian believer due to an experience that he believed was an appearance of the risen Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

That Jesus died, indicated in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3, is very clear. This death was physical, not just spiritual or mystical, and His being dead was so convincing that the Romans took His body off the cross and gave it to others who buried it in a tomb. Several people at this point handled the body, authenticating and verifying that Jesus was dead.

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<sup>6</sup> Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 9–10.

Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea, buried Jesus's body in his very own tomb on his property. Just to be clear:

- Scholars agree Jesus died.
- Skeptics agree Jesus died.
- Historians agree Jesus died.

## **2. Jesus was Seen Alive by Many Following His Death. Vs. 4-9.**

Many theories surround the occurrence of a miracle. Before the resurrection miracle discussion, consider how some discount miracles and miracle claims. Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas suggest the following six ways miracles are discounted in summary form.

- *Miracles rationalized.* Some will postulate a reported miracle by any explanation, no matter how feasible, as somehow being natural. They attempt to explain any peculiar event or miracle claim in naturalistic terms.
- *Miracles as myth.* This approach generalizes reported miracles as being no more than a legend, something that has been created in the mind of some in ancient times.

- *Miracles and sense experience.* This approach denies a miracle because of a lack of empirical data. Proponents against a miracle believe that it cannot be a miracle unless the miracle can be confirmed with repeatable, experimental and observable results. This argument is similar to the idea proposed by skeptic David Hume and the circular logic of a miracle being repeated or else it is not a miracle.
- *Miracles and interpretation.* Perhaps an event was misinterpreted as a miracle when it was not. The very nature of a miracle being evidence of God at work provides God as the One Who is actually interpreting the meaning of the miracle claim.
- *Miracles and faith.* Some suggest that "faith" is all that is needed to believe that a miracle has occurred, neglecting any of the evidence that may be discovered. There is more than mere faith in miracles purported in the Bible.
- *Miracles and evidence.* Evidence for a miracle may or may not be provided to demonstrate the validity of a miracle claim. Those who look for evidence may require sufficient grounds to believe in an event. Others may rely on faith despite the evidence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> R. Douglas Geivett and Gary Habermas, eds., *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History* (IVP Academic, 1997), 16–17.

The miracle of the resurrected Christ can stand up to the scrutiny listed above. It is undoubtedly the miracle of miracles for one to be raised of His power from the dead. Before examining the eyewitness accounts, please know how no physical body of Jesus has ever been found, and the tomb Joseph of Arimathea placed the body in - is empty, providing archaeological evidence because of the bodies' absence. Now for the testimony evidence.

Historical, firsthand, and valid eyewitness accounts are given to Paul, and he lists them in 1 Corinthians 15. Notice the names and groups of people underlined for emphasis in this passage. Each character and group of people will be elaborated on with their testimony to the Resurrection of Jesus. In the next section, these person(s) are considered and labeled as believers or skeptics of Jesus.

*And that he was seen of Cephas (Peter), then of the twelve: <sup>6</sup> After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> And last of all he was seen of me (Paul) also, as of one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:5-8).*

**Peter** (believer), who, when nearing the trial and crucifixion, was guilty of denying even knowing Christ (Matthew 26:69-75), is one of the first people that Jesus encountered in His resurrection form (Mark 16:7, John 21, Luke 21:34-35). Peter saw Jesus, and his life mission and purpose were forever changed. He leaves fishing once again and decides to follow Jesus (John 31:3,19).

**The Twelve** saw Jesus (believers). These twelve are the original twelve disciples minus Judas and plus a man named Matthias (Acts 1:15-26). These disciples have become apostles who have witnessed Jesus alive following His death by crucifixion. John 20:19-31 describes their first encounter with Jesus in greater detail. Jesus appears to them on different days, times, and locations.

Apostles (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*) are "Someone, or something, sent. Derived from the verb 'to send out' (ἀποστέλλειν, *apostellein*)."<sup>8</sup> These apostles were formerly known as "disciples," which are: "A student, pupil, or learner. In the New Testament, it is used for Jesus' followers."<sup>9</sup> These twelve transition from merely following Jesus and learning from and of Him to going out and teaching others about their resurrected Lord Jesus.

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<sup>8</sup> Dan Nässelqvist, "Apostle," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. "Disciple."

**Five hundred** at once (believers). With most of these "above five hundred" witnesses alive, this would have been a bold and verifiable claim to make on the part of Paul. One observer noted, "This would be a rash claim to make if it were untrue."<sup>10</sup> Paul counted "above five hundred" people, many still alive to whom a reporter, researcher, or investigator could have spoken about their testimony of the risen Christ. While a skeptic may suggest a mass hallucination, there is no evidence of anyone at any time in history experiencing a mass hallucination. A mass hallucination of five hundred people seeing and interacting with the same experience could be deemed a miracle or a miracle claim!

This group was not just random; they could be followed up with or interrogated. As Mark Taylor suggests, "His writing implies a known group rather than five hundred anonymous witnesses."<sup>11</sup> Some have speculated the five hundred at once was on the occasion of *The Great Commission* in Matthew 28:16-20 and Mark 16:15, but this is only speculation.<sup>12</sup> This large group would be unknown to us today had not Paul mentioned them here. "There is no other account of a resurrection appearance to such a crowd, but Paul names it and

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament*, Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 1 Co 15:3-11.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 374.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 374.

underscores the reliability of his witnesses by noting that *most* of them, not all, *are still alive* (v. 6), implying that his claim can be verified by asking the witnesses directly."<sup>13</sup>

**James** (skeptic) saw Jesus. This account is one of the more compelling evidence of the resurrected Jesus. During his ministry, the younger half-brother of Jesus did not believe Jesus was the Messiah. Despite seeing the miracles, hearing the messages, and watching Jesus lead followers about, James (probably the second oldest<sup>14</sup>) did not believe.<sup>15</sup> While the mother of Jesus believed in Him,<sup>16</sup> His siblings did not. For James to see Jesus post-death is a miracle because James would not be looking for Jesus.

Some could argue that the believers were looking for Jesus or imagined seeing Him because they wanted Him to rise again. This flimsy argument could not be accurate for James. He was not looking for Jesus, yet James saw Jesus after his death, forever changing his life. This skeptic turns believer and advocate for Jesus. James becomes the pastor of the "mega-church" in Jerusalem (Acts 15, 21). He also writes the New Testament book

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<sup>13</sup> Dan Nighswander, *1 Corinthians*, ed. Douglas B. Miller et al., Believers Church Bible Commentary (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017), 324.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 6:3.

<sup>15</sup> John 7:5, Psalm 69:8, Mark 3:21.

<sup>16</sup> John 2:5, Mark 15:40.

bearing his name in which God offers such practical wisdom and advice for everyday life for the Christian.

James writes about the receiving the Word of God, "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness (moral filth) and superfluity of naughtiness (evil), and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:21-22). How ironic and incredible a change for the man who initially rejected the "Word made flesh" in Jesus (John 1:14) that after the Resurrection, he is now preaching about believing in the Word of God. This change is the miracle of a changed heart.

**The Apostles** (believers) saw Jesus as described in Luke 24:50 and Acts 1:3-4. It appears that Jesus appeared to much more than only the 12 apostles. Still, Paul emphasizes these appearances to the Apostles, providing credence and weight to the message the apostles were now telling others. Paul indicates that he and the other apostles share the same resurrection message in 1 Corinthians 15:11, "Therefore whether *it were* I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed."

Validating the message of Jesus now shared by the Apostles, one scholar commented, "Christ did not appear to apostles only, but all who were



apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrection (9:1–2)."<sup>17</sup> This group includes one skeptic previously full of rage and anger against Christ and Christians, one named Saul (Paul). He is the one summarizing and writing these eyewitness accounts.

**Paul** (Saul, a skeptic) saw Jesus. One of the most educated men in the first century, Saul was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews"<sup>18</sup> regarding scholarship. Paul is a prolific writer in the New Testament, with nearly half of all the books penned in his name. Outside of Christ, Paul is the most influential apostle and writer in the New Testament. Stanley Porter conveys, "Right after Jesus himself (Paul is) the most important figure in the development and spread of Christianity from an initially regionally located sect of Judaism into a movement that came to be recognized, even by the Romans themselves, as a distinctive religious movement."<sup>19</sup>

For Paul to see Jesus is a miracle! Saul, traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute and imprison Christians while carrying written orders of authority for the persecution from the Temple leaders, is confronted by Christ. Paul gives

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 28, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 374.

<sup>18</sup> Philippians 3:5

<sup>19</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4859087>.

his initial testimony in Acts 9:1-31. In his account, Jesus blinds Saul and emerges from a bright light in the sky; the soldiers with Saul hear a conversation but do not see Jesus; the Lord sends a believer (Ananias) to his aide. Ananias touches Saul's eyes, the blinding scales fall off, and Saul can see again.

Saul began to spend time with the disciples he previously hated and started to preach about the resurrected Jesus. His vocality and change of direction upset the religious leaders in Damascus so much they started plotting to assassinate him. These details are all in his first testimony.

Saul then begins to be referred to as "Paul." Theologian Charles Ryrie teaches, "Saul was his Jewish name and Paul his Roman or Gentile name. Both were given him at the time of his birth, but he now begins to use his Gentile name in this Gentile environment."<sup>20</sup> This name change goes a great distance on the part of Paul to demonstrate that his life was different after seeing Jesus alive following His death.

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible: 1995 Update*, Expanded ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 1753.

## The Timing of the Accounts.

As 1 Corinthians 15 begins, Paul makes it clear that the message of the Resurrection for which he is addressing is a message that he heard from other people. Paul had spoken with the individuals and groups of people that he lists. These people received and knew of the Resurrection of Jesus and believed its validity for some time before Paul committed their testimony to paper. They Saw Jesus in the flesh with their own eyes. David Baggett comments on the timing of this writing:

"Now here is the most interesting part of all, and this is unprecedented in the ancient world, where sources a couple hundred years after an event are often the best we have: Paul received this creed about three to eight years after the death of Jesus. The creed had been formulated before that, and the facts on which it was based yet earlier, which puts this report about the death and resurrection appearances of Jesus in the immediate aftermath of the events in question. For the historian, this sort of evidence is nothing less than golden."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> David Baggett, "Resurrection Matters Assessing the Habermas/Flew Discussion," in *Veritas Books: Did the Resurrection Happen?: A Conversation with Gary Habermas and Antony Flew* (InterVarsity Press, 2018), 115.

Concerning the timing of Paul writing these eyewitness accounts, Gary Habermas, in response to skeptic Anthony Flew, says, "In fact, most critical scholars think we can date Paul's reception of this testimony to A.D. 35, which is only five years after the cross. This isn't the date of the events themselves, but his trip to Jerusalem, where he received this testimony."<sup>22</sup> These were not recollections of decades or centuries earlier. These were accounts told and retold by people who saw Jesus firsthand in a recent time frame.

Is it common and even expected that our fishing stories and the size of the fish we catch change several weeks after a fishing trip? Sure. Many of us remember ourselves to be better students in school or better athletes on the field than we were. Our stories tend to grow and change over time. Interestingly, the story did not grow or change with the Resurrection of Christ. The story remained the same from person to person, whether it was an account told within three years or 300 years following the initial resurrection reports.

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<sup>22</sup> Gary R. Habermas, Anthony Flew, and David Baggett, *Veritas Books: Did the Resurrection Happen?: A Conversation with Gary Habermas and Antony Flew* (InterVarsity Press, 2018), 35.

## 1. Jesus Alive After His Death Is a Miracle.

Jesus' walking, talking, teaching, responding, eating, and interacting personally with people following His death is an absolute miracle. Apologist and author Tom Wright describes the convergence of faith, science, and history in the Resurrection of Jesus. He says,

Faith in Jesus risen from the dead *transcends but includes* what we call history and what we call science. Faith of this sort is not blind belief which rejects all history and science. Nor is it simply—which would be much 'safer'!—a belief which inhabits a totally different sphere, discontinuous from either, in a separate watertight compartment. Rather, this kind of faith, which like all modes of knowledge is defined by the nature of its object, is faith in the creator God, the God who has promised to put all things to rights at the last, the God who (as the sharp point where those two come together) has raised Jesus from the dead *within* history, leaving evidence which demands an explanation from the scientist as well as anybody else.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007), 83.

Paul heard this resurrection news from those who saw Jesus in the flesh and wrote it down in 1 Corinthians 15. In addition to his personal experience with Christ, Paul believed the account these people shared. Paul received this message years from the Resurrection, not centuries or even decades. The people Paul learned from discussed the Resurrection as a conceptual fact. Skeptics cannot argue with what the people saw. The best explanation is that the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is a God-wrought miracle. Disbelief in the possibility of an event does not make an extraordinary event any less a miracle. In fact, because it is such an extraordinary event, it is possibly even more believable for it to be a miracle.

## Conclusion

Jesus being seen alive after being completely dead is a miracle that is accounted for by first-century eyewitnesses who testify within proximity in time and location to the event, and they have a consistent retelling of the event over time. The story spread around the globe, but it did not grow and did not become sensationalized beyond the original telling of the event. Paul's account provides clear and concise evidence that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a miracle brought about by the power of God.

There is no Christianity without the Resurrection of Jesus. This Resurrection is such an important miracle that Christians today believe and know they have eternal life, can have a vital personal relationship with God, and have a message of hope, love, and peace to share with the world.

This effort to share this good news is hard work, and the church has a mission to fulfill to which Paul concludes, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). We have a living, worthwhile, and active faith because of the miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Discuss the difference between natural events, unnatural and supernatural events.
2. List arguments against the resurrection miracle.
3. Why are these arguments not reasonable in light of the resurrection evidence?



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