

## BELIEVE IN MIRACLES

The Old Testament passage from First Kings Chapter 17 is the first recorded description of a miraculous return from the dead. Elijah, the prophet, taught when Ahab, a Phoenician king, ruled and brought worship of the idol Baal to Israel. The widow is also a Phoenician, and was selected by God to provide food and shelter to Elijah during a time of famine. The passage does not tell us that the woman turned to God simply due to the bottomless jar of meal, but after the child regains life she says, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth." She witnessed a miracle in her own home, and made the connection that Elijah's God is all-powerful.

The passage from Luke is just as dramatic. Jesus comes upon a funeral procession. William Barclay, the famous mid-20<sup>th</sup> century New Testament expositor tells us, "But to the pathos of human life, Luke adds the compassion of Christ. Jesus was moved to the depths of his heart. " Verse 13 of the passage says, "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'" Jesus spoke to the young man, and he sat up and began talking to his mother. Bystanders began praising God, and described Jesus as a great prophet.

This is one of the three descriptions of Jesus raising someone from the dead. Two other passages in the gospels recount the raising of Jairus's daughter and the resurrection of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary.

Restoring a dead person to life is a powerful image in scripture, and we are familiar with many other miracles taught to us in childhood. In fact, there are many other miraculous events that were not recorded in the gospels. Listen to the very last verse from the gospel of John, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written."

Marcus Borg, internationally known biblical and Jesus scholar, states in an essay entitled The Miracles of Jesus, "The miracle stories create a vivid impression of a charismatic healer at work. Sometimes Jesus healed by word. He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Stretch out your hand,' and the hand was restored. Most often touching was also involved. When a leper came to him, Jesus was 'moved with pity' and touched him, and immediately the leprosy left him."

And Dr. Calvin Smith, Ph.D., a British theologian puts it succinctly, "Miracles are those acts which establish the central beliefs of the Hebrew-Christian tradition. They create the faith."

These are great examples of exegesis, but what do the miracles of Jesus mean for us today?

Healers come in many forms today, and science now provides many ways to cure the previously incurable. Medical knowledge advances daily. I know that many of you present in this sanctuary, have experienced one or more life changing returns to health. Was that the hand of Jesus touching you, as Borg says, or was the cure the manifestation of Jesus' power through other people?

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A miracle is defined as a surprising and welcome event that cannot be explained by natural or scientific laws and is considered to be divine.

Jesus' power and the power of Jehovah did not stop with the end to his earthly life. Our ability to be changed or transformed through miracles is still possible.

You may have heard of Dr. Eben Alexander III, an American [neurosurgeon](#), who wrote the best-selling [Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife](#), in which he describes his 2008 [near-death experience](#). Dr. Alexander asserts that science can and will determine that [heaven](#) really does exist. He believes that his recovery was a miracle, and attributes it to supernatural factors.

However, there is a less well-known tale of a recovery from death, found in the book [Heaven is for Real](#). Colton Burpo, a boy from rural Nebraska, survived an emergency appendectomy at age 3 in 2003. His family was overjoyed by his miraculous survival. What they weren't expecting was the story that emerged in the months following the hospital stay. Colton, not yet four years old, told his parents he left his body during the surgery. He talked of visiting heaven and relayed stories told to him by people he met there that he had never met in life, sharing events that happened even before he was born. He also astonished his parents with descriptions and obscure details about heaven that matched the Bible exactly, though he had not yet learned to read. Colton describes Jesus, the angels, how "really, really big" God is, and how much God loves us.

I continue to believe in miracles, because I have personally experienced them in my life. I believe those miracles are a manifestation of Jesus' love for us today.

I can't explain them, and I choose to believe that miracles show that Almighty God is real and that Jesus is real. My faith sustains me, and the power of those miracles has never faded.

Several theologians make the connection between the Kings passage and the Luke passage citing Ephesians 3:20-21, "I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. His power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine (Contemporary English version).

Jesus and Almighty God can create miracles through us and for us. Choose to believe in miracles. Amen.