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MIRACLES REDEFINED: NIGERIAN CONTEXT

By

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Abstract: The concept of miracles has been understood differently among philosophers, Biblicists, and Theologians. Philosophers understood miracles in the context of laws of nature and denied their possibility since laws of nature cannot be broken. Biblicists provided a meaning rooted in the Bible as signs and wonders; some Christians from selected Churches did not differentiate providence from miracles, while theologians have differed on the components that give a portrait of a comprehensive definition of miracles. To provide Christians with a more accurate theological understanding, this paper attempts to offer a different and thorough description of miracles. The study used theological analysis to analyse the primary and secondary data. The research revealed that philosophical ability is inadequate in communicating the doctrine of God and his works. Biblical meaning is relevant in understanding the meaning of miracles from the original languages. At the same time, a theological perspective synthesizes and systematizes the meaning, purpose, parties involved, nature of the events, and the corresponding reaction to the miraculous event. Consequently, miracles are extraordinary divine events, unusual, enigmatic, instantaneous, and accomplished by human agency for a sacred purpose. This is the redefined understanding of miracles. Any event thought to have been performed by God should not be regarded as a miracle by Christians since some of his works are miracles, others are providence. Therefore, to determine whether an event meets the criteria to be classified as a miracle, it should be evaluated in the context of the aforementioned definition. More research is advised in providence to prevent Christians from misinterpreting the theology of miracles.

Keywords: God, Miracles, Laws of Nature, Signs and Wonders, Human Agency

INTRODUCTION

There has been a variety of stances about the concept of miracles. Philosophers, Biblicists, and Theologians have presented perspectives on the subject matter. Philosophers such as Benedict Spinoza, David Hume, and James E. Taylor based their arguments on reason, rational abstract thinking, and logic, while the Biblicists such as James Oliver Bus well and Alan Richardson have based their arguments on the Bible and the original languages (Hebrews and Greek) and provide knowledge that is beyond philosophy and science. The theologians, such as St. Augustine,

Thomas Aquinas (though philosophers), present the conception of miracles theologically.

The theological standpoint is crowded by a variety of views that are rooted in different additions.¹. Scholars such as John Calvin,

¹Traditions refers to the treasures handed over, including a theological position, creed, beliefs, practices, and a unique way of interpreting the Bible. The traditions are sometimes in written form but at other times are oral. They are not ordinary within a giving denomination, given that a member could be sanctioned or excommunicated upon

Benjamin B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, and John F. Mac Arthur² belong to the tradition of Cessationism.³ While others such as Jack Deere, James D. Hernando, John Frame, Wayne Grudem, and Jon Mark Ruthven, are Continuationists.⁴ Some have condemned the contemporary miracles as fake and staged.⁵ Charles R. Gianotti affirms to the piled views that, today, there is a lot of misunderstanding and dissatisfaction about miracles, and it has become a dream that has not been achieved for those who have been longing for its manifestation.⁶

The discussion about miracles has passed through different stages: the disputation between *Rome and John Calvin, the great dispute on miracles* during the Enlightenment period, and the contemporary attack by the Cessationists on the *Pentecostal and Charismatic movement* represented by Joseph Ayo Babalola, Moses Orimolade Tunolase, and Samuel Bilewu Joseph Oshoffa.⁷ Others are Chris Oyakhilome, Ayo Oritsejafor, Lawrence Osagie, David Oyedepo,

breaching them. Thus, ardent followers are required to comply.

²Jon Mark Ruthven. *Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Press, 2011), 4.

³The proponents that denied the continuity of miracles beyond the patristic era

⁴The proponents that still maintain strongly the continuity of miracles.

⁵ Young, William. "Miracles in Church History" *Churchman*, pp. 102-121

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/churchman/102-02_102.pdf (accessed 23 February, 2025). 102, see also Whitcomb 3, Anderson ix.

⁶ Giannotti, Charles R. *Miracles and Faith: A Biblical Understanding*. Version 2.01. 1999.

<http://www.bible-equip.org/articles/biblical-theological/Miracles.pdf>. (accessed 25 November, 2025). 1

⁷ Paul, Jegede Oyeboade. "Evangelism and the rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria" www.evangelism-and-the-rise-of-pentecostalism-in-nigeria.pdf. (accessed 1 June 23). 6, see also Spurgeon 73

Enoch Adeboye⁸ the proponents who birthed the third wave theology.

This paper argues for a more comprehensive theological definition of miracles given the fundamental role definition plays in a discourse for clarity of conceptions and contextual meanings. Thus, the paper is structured to explicate the concept of miracles from the viewpoint of systematic theology, a form of theology that is done in a given context as it "reflects on the meaning and relevance of the word of God for us and our world today" (Nürnberg 4). The study employed a theological analysis of author-based review and a quantitative method.

Philosophical Concept of Miracles

Philosophers have used rational and abstract constructions to conceptualize miracles, influencing Christian theology. While some conclusions are questionable, they remain a fact, shaping theology over centuries.⁹

Blaise Pascal, a 17th-century French philosopher and mathematician¹⁰, defined a miracle as an effect exceeding the natural force of the means employed.¹¹ He believed that miracles must be greater than or transcend natural force, creating results greater than the natural force. Although he did not fully explain the force needed for miracles, his concept of the "effect" does not match biblical depictions. Differently, Benedict Spinoza, a 17th-century Jewish philosopher, developed an idea of miracles based on pantheism.¹² And universal principles. He

⁸Jon Mark Ruthven. *Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Press, 2011), 3.

⁹Anthony Thiselton. *Systematic Theology*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2015. 6

¹⁰Saintsbury and Chrystal 881, see Devlin 2, Chapman 508

¹¹ Pascal, Blaise. *The Thoughts of Blaise Pascal*. Translated from the text of M. Auguste Molinier by C. Kegan Paul. London: George Bell and Sons, 1901.184

¹²Pantheism denies several essential aspects of God's character. If the whole universe is God, then God has no distinct personality. God is no longer unchanging,

believed in one infinite substance, God, and rejected miracles as irrational and impossible. Spinoza also argued that the laws governing the universe are immutable, making miracles impossible due to their immutability. The Jewish synagogue rejected his unconventional ideas,¹³ As well as the researcher for denying God a personal identity of the Being he is.

Spinoza's pantheistic claim that God is the universe or a part of it raises conflicting theological understandings. He did not conceive God as a living being, as some of his creations are not living. Spinoza's understanding of God as one or many is ambiguous, as he lacks the proper foundation to comprehend his miraculous works. David Hume, a Scottish historian and philosopher, was known in the 18th century for his philosophical empiricism and scepticism.¹⁴ He defined miracles as "a violation of the laws of nature, and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can be imagined."¹⁵ Hume, just like other philosophers, perceives the concept of miracles in terms of the laws of nature. He argues that if miracles happen, then there is a violation of the laws of nature. However, experience has taught that the laws of nature are immutable. As such, it is irrational to believe that an effect can alter the laws of

nature.¹⁶ Hume, in his conception of miracles, denies absolutely the occurrence of miracles. He did not give any possibility for miracles to occur. James E. Taylor argues that miracles are caused by God, challenging Hume's view of natural laws.¹⁷ He argues that miracles are rare, unconventional, unusual, or abnormal acts of God that do not break natural laws. Instead, miracles circumvent or transcend the laws of nature, aligning with God's deistic trajectory. This suggests that miracles do not contravene natural laws but rather circumvent them.¹⁸ Taylor's argument follows God's deistic trajectory, placing events in a specific order and choosing to be transcendent rather than immanent. In another way, Christine Overall, a Canadian philosopher and writer,¹⁹ Argues that miracles are not evidence of God's existence, contrary to theistic claims, she believes miracles violate natural laws and are moral evil. Overall's reasoning raises theological questions about God's character, as she attributes evil, a foreign element, to his nature. Her work challenges the theistic viewpoint on God's supernatural works.²⁰ Overall appears to have a weak understanding of the doctrine of God and his extraordinary works for following behind Hume.

Philosophers who derived their ideas on miracles from philosophy or logic did not understand God and his creation. Yusufu Turaki argued that philosophical knowledge is independent of divine revelation but uses human abilities. They reject

because as the universe changes, God also changes. Moreover, God is no longer holy, because the evil in the universe is also part of God...pantheism destroys not only the personal identity of God, but also, ultimately, of human beings as well

¹³ Spinoza, Benedict. *A Theologico-Political Treatise*. Trans. R. H. M. Elwes. New York: Dover, 1951. 82 see also Geisler 10

¹⁴ Cranston, Maurice, and Jessop, Thomas Edmund. "David Hume". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 21 Aug. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Hume>. (accessed 29 February, 2025).

¹⁵ McGrew, Timothy and Robert Larmer, "Miracles", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL =<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/miracles/>>. See also Hume 76

¹⁶ Taylor, James E. "Hume on Miracles: Interpretation and Criticism" *Philosophy Compass* 2/4 (2007): pp. 611–624, p. 612

¹⁷ Taylor, James E. "Hume on Miracles: Interpretation and Criticism" *Philosophy Compass* 2/4 (2007): pp. 611–624, 611–12

¹⁸ Taylor, James E. "Hume on Miracles: Interpretation and Criticism" *Philosophy Compass* 2/4 (2007): pp. 611–624, p. 617

¹⁹ Overall, Christine. "Christine Overall" Department of Philosophy, Queens University, <https://www.queensu.ca/philosophy/people/christine-overall>. (accessed 5th February 2025). 1

²⁰ Overall, Christine. "Miracles as Evidence Against the Existence of God" *Southern Journal of Philosophy*. 23 (3): 1985, pp. 347–353, p. 347

miracles as ill deeds. On the other hand, theistic theologians combined their theological and philosophical expertise, believing in miracles based on God's revelation.

Biblical Concept of Miracles

Interacting with the Bible in Biblical studies and theological engagement is crucial. Anthony Thiselton believes the Bible is the primary source of Christian theology, and its material must be applied in its historical context.²¹

James Oliver Buswell defines miracles from a biblical perspective as extraordinary events inexplicable by natural forces, causing observers to postulate a super-human personal cause and serving as evidence of wider implications.²² Buswell identifies the miraculous occurrences' origin, goal, and nature but does not mention God or human action. However, Alan Richardson, a 20th-century scholar, identified three terms for miracles in the New Testament: *semeia* (signs), *terata* (wonder), and *Dunamis* (power).²³ A miracle, as *semeia* indicates the purpose of the miracle, *terata* points to how the miraculous event awakens wonder in the witnesses of the miraculous, and '*Dunamis*' denotes the divine supernatural power in nature.

C. Brown, a professor and distinguished scholar of systematic theology at Fuller Seminary of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, points to two Hebrew terms used in the Old Testament to denote miracles, "*Ot*" (sign) and "*mopet*" (wonder). The terms are translated as *Semeion* in the *Septuagint* and *Signum* and *portentum* in the *Vulgate*. *Ot* depicts a sign or pointer to Yahweh's historical acts in nature, not a violation as some philosophers maintain. The sign is not the end but a lead to the main thing.²⁴ Brown did not have a

comprehensive conception of miracles because he focused on signs and wonders only, which are inadequate to describe the miraculous event and its cause. Though sign and wonder are the central words used in the OT to communicate the concept of miracles, today, it has been expounded from the NT.

Craig Blomberg, an American scholar and professor of the New Testament, criticizes the evangelical status quo and advocates for the conservative evangelical tradition. He identifies three theocentric periods with miraculous events: creation, Moses and Joshua, and Elijah and Elisha.²⁵ Despite these supernatural occurrences, the Bible does not label creation a miracle. Despite its greatness, the creation of the universe was not created through human agency or had witnesses, thus, it was not labelled as a miracle. The miracles of Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha, as well as Joshua's halting of the sun, should not be grouped with creation. Lowering the periods of miracles to these three periods dented the other periods with few miraculous events, for instance, freeing Daniel from the den of lions and Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego from the fiery furnace.

In his stance, Linus T. Monday holds that miracles were indicators that pointed beyond themselves, indicating something greater. People were saved from bodily illnesses as a result of the miracles. Or they showed being freed from the power of the devil. These two deliverances were genuine in their own right. However, they also represented the entire framework of salvation. Jesus came to bring about enduring and eternal salvation, not just to make a short-term difference in different people's lives. Deliverance from spiritual death—from sin, from guilt, and the authority of Satan's kingdom—is a fundamental component of this salvation.²⁶ Monday considers

²¹ Anthony Thiselton. *Systematic Theology*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2015, 12

²² Buswell, James Oliver. *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), I, p. 176

²³ Richardson, Alan. "Miracle, Wonder, Sign, Power", *A Theological Workbook of the Bible*, editor: Alan Richardson. London: SCM Press Ltd. 1950, 153.

²⁴ Brown, C. "Miracles", *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, General Editor: Orr, James (Michigan:

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1979). PC Study Bible V5.

²⁵ Blomberg, Craig L. "Miracles", *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Bakers Book House, 1996, 532

²⁶ Monday, Linus T. "Structure, Purpose and Meaning of Miracles of Jesus" *Intercontinental Journal of*

the significance of miracles to have eternal value, not just temporary value.

Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell argue that biblical miracles aim to bring God's glory and love into bold relief, directing attention towards His mighty acts.²⁷ They say that biblical religion is focused on actual historical events and manifestations of God's power, with the Red Sea's opening being the most important miracle. The study by Treier and Elwell emphasizes that miracles in the New Testament represent God's power to restore creation, restore His image, and destroy death. They argue that the theme of biblical religion is not theory but action. They note that miracles in the Old Testament are related to redemption, while in the New Testament, they are associated with restoring creation. Their ideas are logical and consistent with the Bible.²⁸ They further add that:

Without this miracle, the early church would not have come into being, and we who live two thousand years later would never have heard of other NT miracles. Indeed, we probably never would have heard of Jesus, who would have been forgotten along with hundreds of other obscure preachers and miracle workers who wandered about the ancient Middle East.²⁹

The Gospels teach that Jesus' miracles are prophesied works of the Messiah, signs only to those with spiritual discernment. They believe the church's foundation is due to God's supernatural power, and miracles are crucial for its development. The ultimate goal of miracles is to glorify God and restore creation and the image of

God in man. Both Old and New Testament miracles relate to Jesus Christ's redeeming work.³⁰

Raphael Judah Zwi Werblowsky defines miracles as "extraordinary and astonishing happening that is attributed to the presence and action of an ultimate or divine power" (Werblowsky). Etymologically, from the stance of Greek, it is *thaumasion*, while Latin is *miraculum*, as that which triggers wonder, being extraordinary in itself and astonishing or inexplicable by normal standards.³¹ He argues that miracles are occurrences that signify something beyond themselves. Old Testament miracles serve two functions: revelation and significance, and verification.³² Miracles can serve various purposes, such as providing food, curing illness, or saving the Israelites from danger. The ultimate goal is to show off God's strength or saints, revealing a multifaceted divine reality. Werblowsky's description encapsulates essential elements of miracles, emphasizing the purposes of revelation and authentication, as revelation describes God's salvation for the Israelites and how miracles characterize God's men. Werblowsky's definition portrays vital constituents of miracles, and the purpose of miracles he proposed, which are revelation and confirmation, are irrefutable, given that the revelation centers on God's saving act for his people, and how miracles defined men of God. William A. Dryness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen argue that biblical terms for miracles emphasize acts of power that reveal God's might in expressing the gospel. They believe these miracles inspire awe and indicate a reality derived

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<https://www.globalacademicstar.com/download/article/structure-purpose-and-meaning-of-miracles-of-jesus.pdf> (accessed 24 February, 2025), 5

²⁷ Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell. (eds.) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017, 551

²⁸ Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell. (eds.) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017, 551

²⁹ Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell. (eds.) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017, 552

³⁰ Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell. (eds.) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017, 552

³¹ Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi. "Miracle". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/miracle>. (accessed 8 December 2024).

³² Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi. "Miracles", *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, volume 12, Ed. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1983), 270.

from *semeion*, *teras*, and dynamism.³³ Dryness and Karkkainen corroborate the same thoughts with Werblowsky for perceiving the idea of miracles from *semeion*, *teras*, and *dynamis*. As such, miracles exemplify God's power that generates wonder and draws the attention of people to a truth.

Theological Concept of Miracles

Theological conceptions are based on critical thinking and Christian experiential endeavour, aiming to find ultimate reality, meaning, and purpose in life. They are consistent with the inspired Scriptures and apostolic teachings.

Aquinas, a 13th-century scholar, argues that God's actions defy nature, as everything is an instrument in his hands, and serving the chief agent is the divine goal. Aquinas maintains that a miracle "is a sensible effect produced by God, which transcends all the forces of nature."³⁴ *He explains that miracles can be evaluated with the same level of certainty as natural science objects since they are comprehensible facts. Thus, an effect is a miracle. However, since things do not just happen, there must be a reason for every effect. He stated that God is the cause of miracles; he utilizes Himself as the cause even though He may use an agent to carry out His will.*³⁵ Aquinas highlights the nature of miracles, including God as the cause, and the possibility of using a human agency. He describes the miraculous event as sensible, something that can be evaluated, and cannot violate the laws of nature.

Charles Hodge, a 19th-century American scholar, states that:

THE word miracle is derived from miror, to wonder, and the refore signifies that which excites wonder. In this etymological sense of the word it may be used to designate any extraordinary event adapted to excite surprise and rouse attention. The words used in the Bible in

reference to miraculous events do not inform us of their nature. The most common of these are, (1.) מִלְאָה, something separated, or singular. (2.) תָּאוּ, signum, portentum, something designed to confirm. (3.) תַּפְמוּ (of uncertain derivation), used in the sense of τῦπος, of persons and things held up as a warning, and for remarkable events confirming the authority of prophets. (4.) הִרְבֵּה, power, used for any extraordinary manifestation of divine power. (5.) "Works of the Lord." In most cases, these terms express the design, rather than the nature of the events to which they are applied.³⁶

Hodge corroborates with many theologians who view miracles as an extraordinary event that causes wonder. He traced their origin to the Bible but admits that the Bible does not provide the nature of the miraculous event.

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, a professor at Princeton Seminary, was the historical pinnacle of the Cessationist tradition.³⁷ He holds that, in particular, a miracle is an outward phenomenon brought about by God's instantaneous efficiency,³⁸ Identifying three problems: God, the outside world, and effect, all related to one another. Warfield rejects philosophical claims that miracles violate nature's laws, arguing that natural effects are more powerful.³⁹ However, he fails to mention human agency, eyewitness reactions, event nature, and purpose, which are essential to understanding miracles. The miraculous are supernatural occurrences caused by God's might, not natural means. Warfield distinguishes between the supernatural and providential, arguing that miracles are

³⁶Charles Hodge. *Systematic Theology*. Vol.1. USA: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005, 458

³⁷Jon Mark Ruthven. *Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Press, 2011). 7 see also Bamberg 229, Patton 385

³⁸A *Question of Miracles* 170, see also Jon Mark Ruthven. *Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Press, 2011). 44

³⁹Jon Mark Ruthven. *Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Press, 2011). 4

³³ Dryness, William A. and Veli-Matti Karkkainen (eds.) *Global Dictionary of Theology*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008, 549

³⁴ St. Thomas: *Contra Gentiles*, III, C, CI. Summa, la pars. quaes. CV, Art. VII.

³⁵ St. Thomas: *Contra Gentiles*, III, C, CI. Summa, la pars. quaes. CV, Art. VII.

inconsistent with natural processes. He contends that some supernatural occurrences are providential, primarily due to God's direct action, addressing Aquinas' imperfection in understanding miracles.⁴⁰

Similarly, Emery H. Bancroft defines a miracle as an event produced by God for a holy purpose so extraordinary that it contradicts natural laws.⁴¹ They are the inevitable accompanies and confirmations of new revelations from God that serve to highlight new truth or novel realities, and they end after that truth has achieved traction.⁴² In response to Bancroft, miracles do not necessarily conflict with natural laws since they are deemed divinely commissioned. Their purposes are not confined to affirming God's message or the message's messengers only. Still, miracles meet human needs by salvaging them from illness and Satan and ultimately glorifying God. Bancroft argues as the Cessationist that he is, but differs from him respectfully.

Emery H. Bancroft defines divine revelation as a supernatural communication from God to man, either oral or written.⁴³ He quotes Horne, who believes revelation is a discovery beyond natural or reason, certified by attested miracles and fulfilled prophecy.⁴⁴ Robert L. Reymond argues that God's revelatory activity and his redemptive activity produced the Holy Scriptures and miracles of power, which authenticated the credentials of human organs of special revelation. Christ's miracles were primarily used to prove his teachings, as his message was supernatural and beyond human reason, and to prove his divinity.⁴⁵ Karl Rahner argues that miracles serve

as external signs of God's approval and have an eschatological aspect, as seen in Jesus Christ's resurrection. He agrees with Cessationists that the primary goal of miracles is to affirm revelation and messengers, with the ultimate goal of bringing the world and God into harmony.⁴⁶

A.A. Allen, known as "The Miracle Man," played a significant role in North America's 20th-century Pentecostal healing revival. His consistent ministry led to a resurgence of faith in miraculous healing. However, his death was due to severe drunkenness, causing tensions between his achievements and morality.⁴⁷ Allen's book, *The Price of God's Miracle Working Power*, delves into his encounter with supernatural power. Through prayer and Bible study, he was given the ability to cure leprosy. He believed in divine commands to heal the sick and oppressed, which became his mandate and is central to every ministerial call.⁴⁸

A man claims to have experienced God's powerful might through Jesus' name, leading to the immediate healing of disabled people, the disappearance of tumours, and health recovery. He claims that diseases like cancer, deafness, tumours, goitres, and sugar diabetes vanish when healed in Jesus' name. Allen's thoughts highlight God's miraculous power, comparing it to John's experience of being prostrated in revelation. He believes in miracles but does not define them. Instead, he encounters God through prayer and his word, becoming a miracle worker. Numerous miracles have marked his ministry.

Henry M. Morris, a 20th-century scientist, combined science and religion to discuss miracles. He acknowledges that miracles are rare

⁴⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield. *Counterfeit Miracles*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1918, 192, 234

⁴¹ Emery H. Bancroft. *Christian Theology*. 2nd Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1976, 27

⁴² Emery H. Bancroft. *Christian Theology*. 2nd Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1976, 31

⁴³ Emery H. Bancroft. *Christian Theology*. 2nd Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1976, 25

⁴⁴ Emery H. Bancroft. *Christian Theology*. 2nd Revised Edition. Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1976, 25

⁴⁵ Reymond, Robert L. *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998, 409

⁴⁶ Rahner, Karl and Herbert Vorgrimler. *Dictionary of Theology*. Second Edition. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981 309

⁴⁷ Allen, Asa Alonso. *The Price of God's Miracle Working Power*. Hope faith Prayer, 2012, 1-2

⁴⁸ Allen, Asa Alonso. *The Price of God's Miracle Working Power*. Hope faith Prayer, 2012, 1-2, 14-18

and could be explained by science, stating that they still occur today.⁴⁹

A sudden creation of matter (as when Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed the multitude – see Mt. 14:14-21) or creation of energy (as when the waters of the Red Sea were suspended by some kind of anti-gravitational energy as vertical walls to allow the children of Israel to pass through the sea on a dry sea-bed and then allowed to collapse and drown Pharaoh's army when they tried to follow – see Ex. 14:21-28 – these would certainly be true miracles, incapable of any naturalistic explanation except by flat denial that the records as we have them are true.⁵⁰

Morris defines miracles as supernatural creations, citing the creation of matter and energy. Matter is the material substance of the observable universe, possessing attributes like mass and volume. On the other hand, energy is a system's capacity to perform work. Morris' scientific hypothesis does not clarify whether other miraculous occurrences, such as healing and exorcism, are classified as matter or energy formations. Miracles are sign-driven and occur to achieve a purpose, not at random.

Norman Leo Geisler, an American Christian theologian and philosopher, defined a miracle as a supernatural exception to the everyday world's course, a divine intervention. He believed miracles are supernatural acts of God, different from nature's operations, and not based on natural law. Geisler favoured transcendence over God's immanence, arguing that miracles are unusual, irregular, and specific ways God acts within the world, agreeing with James Taylor.⁵¹

Geisler argues that miracles are heavenly confirmations of God's messages, contrasting with nature, a consistent pattern of God's activity. He argues that miracles are rare occurrences

using uncommon power to validate unusual messages, while from a divine perspective, they are supernatural actions that draw God's people's attention. God granted humanity dominion over the natural world, and from a human perspective, miracles are rare occurrences that validate unusual signs.

According to J. Millard Erickson, a conservative evangelical theologian, miracles are supernatural, unusual acts of God's providence that cannot be explained by nature⁵² and serve at least three functions: to glorify God (the most important), to establish the supernatural basis of the revelation which often accompanied them, and to meet human needs. God's providence, a supernatural work, is derived from the Latin word *providentia*, meaning foresight or forethought. It is found throughout the Bible and can be divided into common or general grace and particular grace. Common grace emphasizes God's concern for his creation, while particular grace refers to His involvement in the salvation of the elect.⁵³

Reymond describes God's providence as a combination of wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy (Psalm 145). The Psalmist emphasizes that God prepares for, sustains, and manages his creation with cautious foresight.

Francis Nigel Lee, a miracle is an event that human senses can discern, is a result of God's desire, and is accompanied by a religious leader to authenticate his divine commission and message.⁵⁴ Lee's three components are comprehensive, with the first attributed to human senses, the second to spiritual traditions, and the third to a religious instructor.

Scholar John F. MacArthur, Jr. defines a miracle as “an extraordinary event wrought by God through human agency, an event that cannot be explained by natural forces. Miracles always are designed to authenticate the human instrument God has chosen to declare a specific revelation to those who witness the

⁴⁹ Morris, Henry M. *Miracles: Do they Still Happen? Why We Believe in Them*. Green Forest: Master Books Publishers, 2003, 5-9

⁵⁰ Morris, Henry M. *Miracles: Do they Still Happen? Why We Believe in Them*. Green Forest: Master Books Publishers, 2003, 33

⁵¹ Geisler, Norman L. *Miracles and the Modern Mind: A Defense of Biblical Miracles*. Revised, Second Edition. USA: Bastion Books, 2012, 9-10

⁵² Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. USA: Baker Books House, 1986, 406

⁵³ Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. USA: Baker Books House, 1986, 409

⁵⁴ Francis Nigel Lee. “Miracles and Pseudomiracles: What, When, and Why?” PhD Dissertation submitted to Whitefield Theological Seminary, Fla., U.S.A. 2002, 1-3

miracle".⁵⁵ He identifies five key points in miracles: human agency, supernatural events caused by God, transcending natural processes, and the significance of miracles. MacArthur believes that God alone is the cause of supernatural phenomena, even when human action is responsible for their demonstration. MacArthur argues that miracles are orchestrated to authenticate messengers who announced revelations using the Pentateuch, prophetic literature, and the New Testament. However, the significance of miracles extends beyond confirming messengers and messages, necessitating a theological answer.

Sinclair B. Ferguson's in his editorial work, explains that a miracle is derived from the Latin term *miraculum*, meaning "a wonder", signifying that it is "the supernatural interference with nature or the course of events".⁵⁶ Ferguson underscores three issues: wonder, interference, and the course of nature. His understanding of miracles is based on David Hume's framework, focusing on nature rather than individuality. He believes Christ's resurrection signifies his restoration and God's new order. Ferguson does not mention the agency behind supernatural involvement and believes miracles are historically valued as extraordinary expressions of God's grace and divine attestation. The word "miracle" originates from the Latin word "*miraculum*," meaning a wonder, and is viewed as a manifestation of God's love and divine confirmation of the performer's identity. Miracles have been viewed as divine involvement with nature, rejecting God's immanence in the universe. However, scholars like Augustine and his followers accept the possibility of unknown higher rules at work during miracles. The supernatural nature of these events can make observers wonder or be shocked.

Christian Michel Harfouche, a Maronite Catholic Christian, was ordained by God in 1976 and was known for his miraculous ministry. He preached in over 75 countries, leading to hundreds of thousands of people accepting Christ and

witnessing healing miracles. Harfouche believed miracles are supernatural occurrences orchestrated by God, and two key components were prayer and the Bible. Early apostles dedicated themselves to prayer and the Word, demonstrating God's benevolent influence on their lives and work.⁵⁷ Harfouche did not clarify if modern believers need the Holy Spirit to perform miracles or if it can be accomplished through prayer and communion with God. Christian philosophers view miracles as exceptional occurrences defying natural principles, serving divine purposes.

NIGERIAN PERCEPTION OF MIRACLES

The empirical data were collected through the use of questionnaire from the five blogs of the Christian Association of Nigeria in Plateau State. Respondents are from the Catholic, Baptist, and Living Faith Church, Church of Christ in Nations, Cherubim and Seraphim, Redeemed Church of Christ, Evangelical Winning All, Church of Christ, Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria, United Missionary Church, Deeper Life Church, and Assemblies of God Nigeria. The data the respondents provided was their personal opinions and not representing the tradition of their Churches.

Understanding Miracles

Descriptions	Frequencies	Percentages
Demonstration of Divine Power	12	12%
Extraordinary occurrence unexplainable by nature	35	35%
Supernatural intervention of God in the affairs of men.	13	13%
Supernatural acts that surprise people	32	32%
Others	8	8%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Work 2025

⁵⁵John F. MacArthur. *Charismatic Chaos*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992,106

⁵⁶ Ferguson, Sinclair B. (ed.). *New Dictionary of Theology*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988, 433

⁵⁷Harfouche, Christian. *The Miracle Ministry of the Prophet*. Pensacola: Power House Publishers, 2000.

Thirty-five 35(35%) of the respondents assert that miracles are extraordinary occurrences unexplainable by nature, while thirty-two 32(32%) of the respondents hold that miracles are supernatural acts that surprise people. The majority of the respondents understood miracles as extraordinary occurrence that are unexplainable by nature and causes people to surprise.

Miracles witnessed, experienced, or performed

Descriptions	Frequencies	Percentages
Salvation	12	12%
Answered prayers	16	16%
Healing	26	26%
Exorcism	14	14%
Safety in the journey	6	6%
Sleeping and waking	12	12%
Provision of different kinds	10	10%
Others	4	4%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Work 2025

To further check the understanding of the concept of miracles, twenty-six 26(26%) of the respondents maintain that they witnessed and experienced miraculous healing. Sixteen (16%) respondents aver that answers to their prayers are miracles since God is involved. Exorcism is another miraculous event that fourteen 14(14%) stated. Twelve 12(12%) of the respondents attest that through salvation they have experienced miracles, and another twelve 12(12%) of the respondents hold that sleeping and waking up are means they have encountered miracles. Ten 10(10%) of the respondents opined that they have received gifts of the needs they were trusting God to provide.

Evaluating the Secondary and Primary Data on the Concept of Miracles

a) Miracles as extraordinary or supernatural occurrences

The majority of responders are aware that miracles are unusual or supernatural occurrences. The miraculous events are therefore extraordinary in their supernatural dimensions and go beyond the normal course of life or the natural ways of explanation. They transcend the normal course of

life and bring God into human affairs. Although it occurs in nature, the miraculous occurrence itself is not natural. They pointed out, for example, that it is not natural for a sea to split in two and permit people to travel freely on dry land, nor is it natural for the sun, which rises in the east and sets in the west every day, to be suspended for any reason. These are unnatural events that happen within the natural context. James Oliver Buswell, a twentieth-Century Presbyterian scholar, corroborates with the respondents' view that miracles are extraordinary events beyond explanation in terms of ordinary natural forces. Likewise, an Israeli scholar, Raphael Judah Zwi Werblowsky, avows that miracles are extraordinary happenings predicated on the presence and action of ultimate or divine power.

This idea that "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul" is supported by Luke's story in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 19:11 NIV). The plural form of the phrase indicates that Paul worked remarkable miracles. New Living Translation (NLT) uses unusual, while other translations, including the Revised Standard Version (RSV), use special. In the context of the research, this word carries the connotation of extraordinary, different from the ordinary, regardless of whether it is translated as extraordinary, special, or unusual.

The laws of nature and miracles are the subject of intellectual and religious debate. Using natural laws to define miracles is untenable. Some of the arguments seem plausible to the researcher because, if the definition of a miracle is based on natural laws and the idea is new, what exactly was a miracle before the law of nature was discovered? It implies that miracles have no significance or explanation, which is not accurate. From a different angle, the development of contemporary notions shouldn't be constrained by the dynamic nature of knowledge. Second, considering that some miracles, like healings and exorcisms, don't seem to "break any law of nature," describing miracles in terms of natural laws diminished the concept's depth. Instead, they seek to return victims' circumstances to their original state. Therefore, people who view miracles in this way are reductionists because they reduce them to a single occurrence inside the framework of natural rules.

Miracles are instantaneous events that arouse wonder and are often referred to as the extraordinary acts or works of God. The extraordinary nature of miracles and the instantaneous effect of these events that activate wonder. Examples of miracles include Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, and the Apostles, who performed miracles that were instantaneous, triggering wonder and amazement. Eldon George Ladd maintains that "The disciples...were also instruments of the Kingdom in that the works of the Kingdom were performed through them as through Jesus himself... they too healed the sick and cast out demons ... the same power of the Kingdom worked through them that worked through Jesus."⁵⁸ Examples include the healing of different ailments, restoring life to the dead, exorcism, and many others. The miraculous events are accomplished by human agency, unless otherwise, occurring at specific times, unlike daily natural phenomena. They serve a divine purpose, fulfilling human needs, promoting faith in Christ, and bringing glory to God. Keller holds that "They lead not simply to cognitive belief, but to *worship*, to awe and wonder...He used miraculous power to heal the sick, feed the hungry, and raise the dead".⁵⁹ Rousas John Rushdoony, on the other hand, maintains "the purpose of the miracles was to glorify God, and the reaction of faith to the miracles was to glorify God also"⁶⁰

As such, alternatively, miracles are extraordinary divine events, unusual, enigmatic, instantaneous, and accomplished by human agency, for a sacred purpose. This is the redefined understanding of miracles.

The components of this definition are explicit in the Bible, while some are implied. The extraordinary or supernatural that points to an event beyond the ordinary or natural is found in Psalm 77:13, Acts 19:11, and 1 Corinthians 12:9. The component *unusual* talks of frequency of occurrence. The New International Version of the Bible uses extraordinary in Acts 19:11, which depicts the plurality of Paul's miracles. However, other translations, such as the Revised Standard Version (RSV), use *special*, and the New Living Translation (NLT) uses *unusual*. As such, the extraordinary should not be considered the usual way of life but the unusual when God acts within the world. The next component is *enigmatic*, which describes the miraculous event as something inexplicable and unfathomable, such as Job 5:9 NIV and John 9:20-33. Instantaneous is another component that points to the result of the Divine power. Natural results often follow the gradual process, but the supernatural is instantaneous. The evidence is healing a woman with the issue of blood in Mark 5:25-34, restoring the ear of Malcus in Luke 22:51, turning water into wine in John 2:1-11, and many others. Finally, God uses human agency to fulfill his will of the miraculous, though in some exceptional cases, he uses animals. God used Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, the Apostles, Church fathers, and some believers today. Reality of miracles witnessed, experienced, or performed. The respondents' perspective is arguable; it is not theologically right to categorically conclude that salvation, answer to prayer, healing, a safe journey, sleeping and waking, and provision of different kinds as miracles. All these events involve the Divine action, yet not miracles. Salvation can only be miraculous when God wishes to make it so, but a normal process where God draws people to Himself is not miraculous because they fail to meet the definition above. It is a usual way God adds to his family, and the Bible has never referred to the salvation of humanity from sin and death as a miracle, though it is purely the work of God. Secondly, the answer to prayer can be providential or supernatural. Whether the answered prayer ended in the provision or getting what was asked, the components of miracles must be seen to characterize it, or else it is not miraculous. Any

⁵⁸Ladd, George Eldon. *A Theology of the New Testament*. Revised Edition, edited by Donald A. Hagner. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, 114, see also Mt. 10:8; Lk. 10:17

⁵⁹Keller, Timothy. *The Reason for God*. New York: Dutton, 2008.

⁶⁰ Rousas John Rushdoony. *The Institutes of Biblical Law*. Gary North: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973, 776-777, see also Mark 2:12.

miraculous event must happen *beyond* the natural way of doing things. The term “beyond” is strong in this context because it is the benchmark for classifying the natural and the supernatural. Safety in journeys is mostly providential, sleeping and waking are providential, and provision of different kinds is mostly providential. They can only be miraculous if they occur in a manner that is beyond the ordinary.

CONCLUSION

The concept of miracles has received various understanding among philosophers, Biblicists, theologians and some Christians in Nigeria. The study highlights the various contributions of scholars to development of the concept. Some stances shape and reshape the concept of miracles while other understandings do not align with the Biblical and theological positions. To provide Christians with a more accurate theological understanding, this paper offered a different and thorough description of miracles, thus, miracles are extraordinary divine events, unusual, enigmatic, instantaneous, and accomplished by human agency, for a sacred purpose. This is the redefined understanding of miracles. Therefore, to determine whether an event meets the criteria to be classified as a miracle, it should be evaluated in the context of the aforementioned definition.

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