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A Missing Concept: (Elite) Judean and Hellenistic Culture

IT IS STANDARD IN New Testament studies both to assume that the modern concept of miracle is applicable to a widespread phenomenon, and to assume that “several [ancient] terms, variously translated, denote this phenomenon.”¹ Whether the modern term and concept of miracle is appropriate to ancient accounts that refer to *dynameis* or *terata* or *paradoxa* or *semeia*, however, requires investigation. It should not be imagined either that our investigation can establish what the vast majority, or what most people, believed. Nearly all Judean and Hellenistic literary sources were produced by the cultural elite. We have few or no direct sources for most ordinary people in antiquity. Most of our survey will thus necessarily focus on elite culture.² The Gospels, however, which consisted primarily of traditions and stories about ordinary people that emerged from ordinary people, provide sources at least for the villagers of Galilee and perhaps nearby areas into which the early Jesus movements spread. In the survey of chapter 2 and the analysis of healing and exorcism stories in part 3, we will thus be dealing with popular Galilean and nearby culture.

1. As exemplified in the article by Remus, “Miracle,” 857.

2. See the more extensive surveys of “the ancient evidence” in Keener, *Miracles*, chs. 1–3; and in Eve, *Jewish Context*.

Elite Judean Culture

To ascertain whether an equivalent to the modern concept of miracle was operative for elite Judeans contemporary with Jesus, we may best examine Judean texts contemporary or nearly contemporary with Jesus and the Gospels. Our task has been facilitated by studies that examine “the concept of miracle” in one or more of these texts, that is, simply assuming the concept and then looking for its equivalent or appearance in the ancient Judean text(s). Eric Eve’s recent survey is particularly useful insofar as, while still claiming that most second-temple Jews did believe in miracles, he must admit that he does not find very clear evidence of an ancient equivalent of the modern concept of miracle in most of the texts he examines.³

One might reasonably imagine that the most obvious texts in which to look for an ancient Judean equivalent of the modern concept of miracle—for a concept of or term for an extraordinary happening inexplicable in ordinary life, hence due to divine or supernatural agency—would be texts produced by ancient Judean intellectuals, learned scribes, such as the book of Sirach. And indeed, sages such as Ben Sira not only taught instructional wisdom to their protégés but cultivated cosmological wisdom about the governance of the universe and reflective or speculative wisdom about wisdom itself as a transcendent force involved in that divine governance. They had learned the traditional, shall we say international, scribal lore about the correlations between earthly phenomena and events and the heavenly forces involved in divine governance.⁴ In contrast with modern Enlightenment philosophers, however, the ancient sages constructed no sharp division between Nature and the supernatural. In the ancient Near East the divine powers of the universe were directly and regularly involved in earthly affairs; or, in the case of Judea, “the Most High,” or God, was involved in earthly governance either directly or through one of the many semi-divine forces or spirits (messengers or angels).

Ben Sira’s speech about physicians and their medicines offers a good example of the divine–human synergism (Sir 38:1–15). Just as the Lord created medicines out of the earth, so the physician’s healing also comes from the Most High. The ill person should pray to the Lord (who will heal) and make the appropriate sacrifices but also resort to the physician and pray for the success of his diagnosis and healing. The modern concept of

3. Eve, *Jewish Context*.

4. Fuller treatment in Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries*.

miracle seems quite foreign to Ben Sira's understanding of healing and of the governance of the world generally by the Most High and Wisdom.

Little of Ben Sira's wisdom (in the book of Sirach) is devoted to the divine agency in Israelite/Judean history. But he does devote a long hymn of praise of the ancestral officeholders, particularly Aaron in the covenant of the (high) priesthood, to the legitimation of the Oniad dynasty that he served as adviser and propagandist (Sirach 44–50). All those officeholders were extraordinary and were established or blessed by the Most High. But that hardly leads us to apply the modern concept of miracle to their divine appointment. Included in the litany of praise are, interestingly enough, Moses's wondrous acts that countered the acts of the Egyptian wise men at Pharaoh's court—but with no mention of Moses's even more wondrous acts of deliverance in the exodus and wilderness (Sir 45:1–4). And when Ben Sira comes to the prophet Elijah (and his protégé Elisha), his knowledge and transmission of prophetic lore is patently evident (48:1–14). He selectively summarizes the tradition of Elijah's prophetic acts known (to us) in 1 Kings 17–19, 21, with emphasis on Elijah's pronouncement of the word of the Lord in the drought and with particular emphasis on the destruction of predatory kings (as commissioned on Sinai), and finally with emphasis on Elijah's future role in the restoration of Israel. Included among the wondrous deeds of Elijah (in two of the twenty-six lines) is Elijah's resuscitation of the widow's son by the word of the Lord (48:5), which in effect downplays the role of healings and multiplication of food in Elijah's renewal of Israel (in 1 Kings 17–19, 21). This hardly provides a basis for suggesting that miracles “could come to be seen as the most important activity of the prophet.”⁵ In Ben Sira's paean, the most important activity of the prophet Elijah in his general renewal of the people was in political pronouncement and agitation commissioned by God.

Insofar as Jesus-interpreters often find his miracles closely related to his supposedly eschatological orientation, we might expect to find interest in miracles in the apocalyptic texts usually cited as expressions of Jewish eschatology. Apocalyptic texts such as Daniel 10–11; the Book of Watchers (1 Enoch 1–36); and the Animal Vision (1 Enoch 85–90) are surely important for comprehending the learned scribal understanding of the origins of the heavenly forces now locked in struggle for control of history as a key aspect of the historical context in which Jesus worked.⁶ But one looks in vain in

5. Vs. Eve, *Jewish Context*, 113.

6. Critical analysis of these texts in historical context in Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries*;

apocalyptic texts such as Daniel 7, 8, 10–11; 1 *Enoch* 1–36; 85–90; and 4 *Ezra* for interest in inexplicable, extraordinary happenings due to divine agents, and one finds in particular no healings and exorcisms.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls provided not just previously unknown Judean texts, but a previously unanticipated variety of texts, a few of which seemed to offer parallels to the miracles of Jesus. The *War Rule* (1QM) presented a highly schematized doctrine of two opposed sets of spiritual forces locked in a struggle for control of human life and history. Other texts seemed to offer a parallel to Jesus's exorcism and to Jesus's supposedly eschatological miracles. Abraham's driving off of the spirit that God had sent to afflict Pharaoh in the *Genesis Apocryphon* 20:11–34, however, is hardly a miracle, insofar as it was accomplished by the well-known and widespread religious practices of prayer and the laying on of hands. Nor does the inappropriately titled *Messianic Apocalypse* (4Q521, which is hardly an apocalypse) present divine actions that could appropriately be labeled miracles.⁷ Liberating captives and bringing good news to the poor have not usually been classified as miracles. Healing the wounded and lifting up the crippled and even restoring sight to the blind are not necessarily miraculous. All of these actions, along with reviving the dead, are allusions to the people's long-standing expectation that God would restore the people still living under circumstances of imperial conquest—expectation articulated in prophetic texts such as Isa 29:18–19; 35:5–6; and 61:1; and in Ps 146:7–8 (and even in the Eighteen Benedictions). The text in 4Q521, in what had become common language of deliverance, does not refer to individual miracles of healing and raising the dead, but to the restoration of the whole people that had been languishing under imperial rule.

The *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (L.A.B), usually taken as contemporary with Jesus and the Gospels, narrates the events in which God has repeatedly delivered the people. Eve claims that the three most common words (in the Latin translation of the Greek translation of an apparently Hebrew original) for *miracle* (which all occur together in L.A.B. 9:7) are *mirabilia*, *signa*, and *prodigia*. Fairly clearly these correspond to the standard terms that referred to the wondrous incidents (“signs and wonders”) of the exodus and wilderness accounts in many Judean texts, some of which were later included in the Hebrew Bible. Survey of the occurrence of these terms, however, shows that the L.A.B. applies these terms “to a rather diverse

Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes*.

7. Versus Eve, *Jewish Context*, 192, following others.

range of phenomena” and “often narrates what we might consider to be a miracle without attaching any particular term to it.”⁸ The narrative seldom calls attention explicitly to how extraordinary or humanly impossible the deeds are that it attributes to God. What links these events is not so much how unusual or supernatural they are, but how significant they are in the deliverance of God’s people, or in the salvation of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked.⁹ That is, what have been taken as miracles in the *L.A.B.* do not fit the modern definition of *miracle* that Eve and others assume.

The histories of Josephus are probably the most important texts from which to discern whether elite Judean culture had some equivalent of the modern concept of miracle. His corpus is extensive; he interprets many episodes from Israelite tradition that modern scholars view as miracles; and his accounts are some of the principal sources for beliefs, practices, figures, and events around the time of Jesus. As interpretations of the miracle stories of Jesus do, so surveys of Josephus’s view of miracles simply assume that miracle was an operative concept in ancient culture.¹⁰ They focus on the terms *semeia* (“signs”), *paradoxos* (“amazing” or “wondrous”), and *epiphaneia* (“manifestation”) as Josephus’s “vocabulary” or “language of miracle.”¹¹ In Josephus’s histories, however, these terms are not comparable to the modern concept of miracle.

Semeia Josephus uses in reference to a variety of things, including passwords, Roman military standards, signals, and symbols. He frequently uses *semeion* for an omen or portent of a future event, including those that preceded Vespasian’s acclamation as emperor and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (*War* 1.23, 28; 3.404; 4.623; 6.296, 315).¹² A derivative but more specialized usage is for the “signs” God provides to convince people

8. Ibid., 120.

9. Ibid., 124.

10. Delling, “Josephus und das Wunderbare”; MacRae, “Miracle”; Otto Betz, “Wunder bei Josephus.”

11. Since Josephus does not use *dynamis* for the unusual occurrences or events themselves, he provides no direct terminological comparison with the Gospels’ representation of Jesus’s “acts of power.” Similarly Eve, *Jewish Context*, 33.

12. *Semeion* in Josephus’s histories is often somewhat synonymous with *teras* (or *terastion*), another term for omen or portent, which he uses more frequently in the *War* than in the *Antiquities*. In suggesting that Josephus uses *teras* in the sense of *miracle* at *War* 1.331; 5.411, Eve, *Jewish Context*, 33, may be depending on Thackeray’s 1927 translation in the Loeb Classical Library.

that prophets are indeed delivering divine messages or carrying out divine commands. In his narrative of Moses's commission on Sinai and his first steps toward leading the exodus from Egypt, Josephus mentions repeatedly the three *semeia* (Moses's staff turning into a snake, his hand becoming white when placed in his bosom, and water from a stream turning into blood) that God gives Moses to convince himself, then the Hebrews, and later Pharaoh to recognize that he is sent by God and does all at God's command (*Ant.* 2.272–284). Although these “signs” do not include the event(s) of actual deliverance from Egypt (2.237; and evidently do not include the plagues), they have been done “for [the people's] liberation.” Some of these “signs” are hardly what modern scholars would classify as miracles: Saul is to meet certain people on the road, including an assembly of inspired prophets, and a sudden hailstorm comes upon the Israelites (6.54–57, 91–94; 10.24–29).

Josephus presents certain occurrences mentioned in Israelite tradition as God-given omens or portents of key events in the deliverance of Israel or of Israel's heroes or kings. What makes them “signs,” however, is not their occurrence beyond what is humanly or naturally possible (what characterizes the modern concept of miracle) but their relation to those future events, and often a prophet's role in announcing and/or petitioning God for them. Josephus and other elite Judeans, like Tacitus and other ancient Romans, understood prophecy, dreams, omens, and portents as among the means by which God (or the gods) governed the world and communicated with humans.¹³ Such prophecy and portents, however, were “not regarded as miracles.”¹⁴ After recounting Elijah's prophecies about king Ahab, Josephus concludes in a typical, moralizing fashion: “nothing is more beneficial than prophecy and the foreknowledge which it gives, for in this way God enables us to know what to guard against” (*Ant.* 8.418).

Paradoxos is claimed as another key term in Josephus's “vocabulary of miracle.” Josephus uses the term, however, mostly in the sense of “unexpected” or “amazing” or “wondrous,” in reference to occurrences that modern readers would not classify as miracles. While he does refer to the dividing of the Red Sea as an “amazing deliverance” and to the manna as “divine and wondrous food,” (*Ant.* 2.295, 345; 3.1, 30, 38), he uses the same term for how “amazingly” Moses was raised, for the “wonder” by which Moses was saved by being placed in a basket, and for the “unexpected” gifts

13. Delling, “Josephus,” followed by MacRae, “Miracle.”

14. MacRae, “Miracle,” 132.

and favors the Israelites had received from God prior to the manna and the water from the rock (2.216, 221–223; 3.14). God delivers the people in several “(divine and) wondrous” victorious battles (5.28; 9.14, 58, 60). Daniel in the lion’s den “amazingly” escapes death (10.214). Like the “signs,” the “wonders” of deliverance are also done by the providence (*pronoia*) of God. Josephus, however, does not seem to make much of a distinction between the “wonders” or the “signs” and other manifestations of God’s power and providence.

Epiphaneia, which scholars also include in Josephus’s supposed language of miracle, occurs in connection with certain of the wonders in Israel’s history of deliverance. Moses observes the withdrawal of the sea, after it had been struck by his staff, as “the manifestation of God” leading to their “wondrous deliverance” (*Ant.* 2.339). Some other “manifestations” of God are the fire darting out of the air onto Solomon’s altar and Isaac’s marriage to Rebecca (8.119; 1.255; cf. 3.310). Close to the time of Jesus, Petronius, the Roman governor of Syria, took the unexpected rain that fell following his decision to disobey Caligula’s order to install his statue in the Jerusalem Temple as an indication of God’s “presence” or “manifestation” in protection of the Judeans (18.286). The *epiphaneia* (of God) stands parallel to the power of God as what is revealed in such amazing events. But *epiphaneia* does not correspond to the modern concept of miracle.

Josephus, finally, does not include healings and exorcisms among either the “signs” or the “wonders.”¹⁵ In his account of the healing of Hezekiah, the sign may have led to the healing by evoking the king’s trust in Isaiah’s promise. But the sign, a repetition in the sun’s path, preceded the healing. The healing of Jeroboam’s hand, withered when he gave the signal to arrest the prophet, is a new development after the sign about the future desecration of Jeroboam’s altar and is God’s response to the prophet’s prayer to God (8.232–234, 244). Hezekiah and his people are “amazingly” delivered from conquest by Sennacherib, and the “wonder” of Isaiah’s promise that he will be healed is too much to believe (10.24, 28). But the healing itself, while immediate, is not “amazing.” Elijah’s raising of the widow’s son to life is “beyond all expectation” but not called a sign or a wonder. In his account of Elisha’s actions, Josephus omits several mentioned in the scriptural narrative (2 Kings 1–13), including healings, focusing evidently on political events. The exorcism of a demon by Eleazar before the future emperor Vespasian and his entourage, often cited as evidence of Jewish magic

15. Cf. Eve, *Jewish Context*, 51.

and miracle, is neither a “sign” nor a “wonder,” but a “healing” (*therapeia*; *Ant.* 8.46–48). For Josephus, healings and exorcisms were evidently *not* “signs” or “wonders,” much less miracles.

The Judean historian understands prophecies accompanied by “signs,” and events that were “amazing” portents—whether in the history of Israel or in contemporary affairs—within his overall theology of history as some of the ways that God governs the world. In contrast with the modern Enlightenment worldview, Josephus found omens, portentous events, and prophetic signs compatible with the (rational) nature of the universe. As he says regarding his historiography in his introduction to the *Antiquities*, “nothing will appear unreasonable, nothing incongruous with the majesty of God and his love for humanity; everything, indeed, is here set forth in keeping with the nature of the universe (*tei ton holon physei*)” (*Ant.* 1.24).¹⁶ He does not hesitate to draw “lessons” from his own prophetically interpreted historiography in arguing, for example, against the errors of the Epicureans, that divine providence governs human affairs (e.g., *Ant.* 10.277–280).¹⁷ Josephus and other such Judean elite contemporary with Jesus thus evidently had no concept corresponding to either the modern, Western notion of miracle or the related dichotomy of natural (or historical) and supernatural.

Elite Hellenistic Jewish Culture

With the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the treatises of the mystic Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria we move outside the Judean and Galilean context of Jesus and the origins of the Gospels, and into the cultural influence of Hellenistic enlightenment theology. Among the sections of the *Wisdom of Solomon* are a reflection on the personified semidivine force of Wisdom and on her role in the universe (chs. 6–9), a litany (without names) of how Wisdom had been guiding the people’s affairs since the creation (*Wis* 10:1–11:4), and a long poetic discourse on how the Egyptians were punished in the same events and elements in which the Israelites were delivered (11:5–19:22). What had long become the stereotyped terms for the events of the exodus (*semeion*, *teras*, *thaumastos*, and *paradoxos*) appear

16. MacRae, “Miracle,” 131.

17. See further *ibid.*, 138–41, for his broader explanation of Josephus’s seemingly apologetic “rationalistic” statements regarding the events he narrates; and, more generally, on Josephus’s understanding of the history of the Judeans, see Attridge, *Interpretation*.

at a very few points in these sections. For example, personified heavenly Wisdom knows both the past and the future, knows “turns of speech,” and has foreknowledge of “signs and wonders” as well as of seasons and times (8:8). By entering the soul of a servant of the Lord, she “withstood dread kings with wonders and signs,” and “guided [the people] along a marvelous way” (10:17). Because of God’s all-powerful hand, the Egyptians were troubled by “monstrous specters” (17:15); but his children gazed on “marvelous wonders” in the course of their exodus and wilderness way (19:6–9). Insofar as these passages lay no stress on how the events of deliverance were “amazing or seemingly impossible,”¹⁸ the modern concept of miracle does not seem to fit. There is “no clear-cut miracle vocabulary that would indicate a conscious awareness of a distinct class of events . . . There is no emphasis on these events *as* miracles.”¹⁹

From his survey of Philo’s nonallegorical treatises Eve claims that for him “miracle is a special act of God (possibly through an intermediary) that accomplishes something that would otherwise be impossible.”²⁰ Eve thus makes the ancient Jewish enlightenment theologian sound like the modern Enlightenment philosophers. The survey of terms, however, results in ambiguities. Like Josephus, Philo uses the term *thauma* and its compounds with reference to things that are wonderful or marvelous but hardly miraculous in the modern sense. Only the passive form of “wonder-working” (*thaumatourgeo/ema*) appears to resemble what modern interpreters call miracle working. Caution is in order, however, since Philo at one point refers to “a wonderful piece of nature’s handiwork (*hupo physeos tethaumatourgetai*; *Mut. Nom.* 162). Philo uses the standard terms “signs” and “wonders” both with reference to the exodus-wilderness events and in connection to matters that moderns would not consider miraculous. In a distinctive contrast with the Synoptic Gospels (where Jesus refuses to give a sign), he has Moses perform “signs” as proof that he is God’s chosen agent. Philo deploys the passive form of *megalourgeo* (“mighty work”) with reference to “enormities” as well as to the great works of God.

Completely missing in Philo’s treatises is any suggestion that healing happens in an extraordinary and inexplicable way. He frequently discusses both physical and spiritual healing.²¹ He values the physician as the means

18. Eve, *Jewish Context*, 90.

19. *Ibid.*, 92.

20. *Ibid.*, 61.

21. *Ibid.*, 79.

through which God effects healing (*Leg.* 3.178). Similarly, Philo has no need for exorcism, since he knows of no maleficent spirits.

Philo's treatises come the closest to touting God's wondrous deeds (through Moses) as proofs of divine providence and deliverance. He finds "wondrous" particularly deliverance from human threats, unusual demonstrations of God's providence, and God's punishment. Like Josephus and Hellenistic philosophers, however, Philo understands God or the divine as directly involved in worldly and human affairs, with no separation between Nature or Reason and the supernatural—a separation so central to modern Enlightenment thinking. Indeed, for Philo Reason (*Logos*) was not only divine but was God's Reason.

Elite Hellenistic-Roman Culture

Like Josephus and other Jewish intellectuals, the Hellenistic-Roman cultural elite had no concept that corresponds to the modern Western concept of miracle. As in Josephus's histories, so in Greek or Latin it is difficult to find terms that might correspond to the modern concept of miracle. There are several that refer to wonders, omens, portents, prodigies, or signs, often ominous events or strange occurrences that bode well or ill for city-states or public figures or hopes and fortunes. The extraordinary phenomena or events to which *semeia* or *terata* or *paradoxi* or *prodigia* referred were sometimes attributed to divine agency and sometimes not. Developing usage of the Latin term *miraculum* in late antiquity provides the link to the later Christian and then modern concept of miracle. In early usage, *miraculum* usually meant merely something that aroused wonder (frequently in Livy, *Hist.*, 1.47.9; 2.13.13; 4.35.9; 5.46.3), although by the second century CE it could also be used for wondrous events attributed to a deity (Apuleius, *Met.* 2.28). Unusual healings were not prominent among such "wonders" or "portents," moreover, presumably because unusual healings were not usually thought of as wonders or portents. While it had no such meaning at the time of Jesus himself, however, by late antiquity Christians came to use the term for the wonders Jesus worked, as well as for the acts of the martyrs.²²

Ancient intellectuals, in contrast to modern so-called scientific thinkers, did not make a sharp distinction between divine causation and reason or nature, between the supernatural (miraculous) and the natural. The divine was rational and natural, the gods an integral part of nature, the

22. Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict*, 52, and 234n16.

cosmos. The healings of Asclepius were understood as caused by the god, but also in accordance with human healing practices. As illustrated by the philosopher Celsus, precisely because of their use of reason the cultural elite could understand and affirm, for example, that the healings of Asklepios were done by divine agency (and that Asklepios was divine) through the incubations and other rituals at temples, while Jesus's healings were shams. The famous physician Galen thought that God and nature belong to one and the same continuous reality, in which universal rules pertain. The significant dreams he sends were not miraculous in the sense of interrupting the natural course of things. They did not come from some supernatural realm but from a higher level in a continuum of reality.²³

The Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius provide accounts of healings that modern scholars habitually classify and discuss as miracles.²⁴ In both accounts, after the death of Nero, when the Roman general directing the devastation of Galilee and Judea, Vespasian, was waiting in Alexandria to sail to Rome to consolidate his advent as the new emperor, a blind man and a disabled man sought healing from the new Caesar. The Hellenistic-Egyptian god Serapis had advised or promised that the emperor could heal the blind man by moistening his cheeks and eyeballs with his spittle, and could heal the lame man by touching his leg or arm with his foot. Vespasian's hesitation, the advice he was given, and his decision to proceed may be particularly illustrative of the attitude of the Roman elite. The emperor-to-be was uneasy that he still lacked the numinous *auctoritas* (prestige or divinity) of an emperor, or that he might exhibit a certain *vanitas* (the term can mean "vanity" or "failure"). Suetonius says that although he lacked faith (*fides*) that he could succeed, his "friends" prevailed upon him. Tacitus has him asking the opinions of physicians whether such blindness and infirmity could be healed by human skill. Persuaded that he might be the chosen minister of the divine will and that all things were possible by his good fortune, Vespasian attempted both healings in public before a large crowd—successfully.

23. Tieleman, "Natural Cause," 112. On ancient intellectuals such as Galen and Celsus, see more broadly Martin, *Inventing Superstition*, who emphasizes that they did not have a category of the supernatural in which divine forces were separated from nature (13–14).

24. Tacitus, *History* bk. 4, ch. 81; Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7. See discussion in Morgan, *Year of Four Emperors*, 170–255; Luke, "A Healing Touch" (with a very broad concept of miracles); and Leppin, "Imperial Miracles."

These are vivid accounts of how such healings happened in a network of relations between the person seeking healing, an agent in whom they believed healing power to be working or available, and the divine or the gods (both Serapis and the gods of the Romans). The ancient Alexandrians and Romans, including the elite friends, Vespasian, and the historians Tacitus and Suetonius—as well as the ordinary people—believed or understood that special power (or at least divine favor) was involved in the healing of the blind and disabled who sought healing from the nascent emperor. But all looked to Vespasian himself as the agent of the healing. To abstract (the accounts of) such healings into the concept of miracle sweeps them up into a broad, general modern category inapplicable to the accounts of Tacitus and Suetonius.

Since ancient intellectuals, not sharing the modern distinction between the natural and the supernatural, believed that extraordinary events and incidents such as wondrous healings were possible and happened, they often did not resort to divine agency. Ironically this can be illustrated by an episode of “raising from the dead” by Apollonius of Tyana as portrayed by Philostratus—one of several that have been standardly cited in comparison with the miracle stories about Jesus (*Vit. apol.* 4.45).²⁵ Contrary to the way that the widely used Loeb Classical Library translation has it²⁶ (“a miracle which Apollonius worked”), however, the episode begins rather less ominously: “And here is another of Apollonius’s wonders” (*thauma*). And contrary to the modern concept of miracle, the unusual occurrence is not inexplicable (by nature), nor is it attributed to divine causation. The account begins, “The girl seemed to have died,” and with his touch and whisper, Apollonius “woke the girl up (from sleep) from seeming death.” The episode ends with two alternative (possible) explanations, neither of which involves the divine: he restored a dead girl by the warmth of his touch, *or* he detected a spark of life in her, “for it was said that although it was raining at the time, a vapour went up from her face.” Thus one of the principal episodes that form-critics and other Gospel interpreters have used as a prime example of a Hellenistic miracle story that helps explain (so to speak) the development of the miracle stories about Jesus simply does not fit the concept of miracle presupposed by modern interpreters.

25. Since at least the foundational form-critical work of Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*. Recent review of issues and scholarly treatments in Koskenniemi, “Function of the Miracle Stories,” with broad uncritical concept of “miracles/miracle stories.”

26. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius*.

This brief survey should be sufficient to indicate that ancient Judean and Hellenistic-Roman texts do not have terms and a concept that correspond to the modern concept of miracle. The key difference is evidently that ancient elites understood divine or heavenly powers or God to be involved in earthly or historical life. This contrasts with modern Enlightenment or scientific culture, in which the supernatural or miraculous became separated from Nature and Reason. In Judean culture, that God had repeatedly delivered the people from subjection or suffering was wondrous. In both Judean and Hellenistic culture it was recognized that certain figures might exercise special, unusual powers. But there was no special classification of miracle or the supernatural.

SAMPLE