

# "The Case for Miracles" by Lee Strobel

"The Case for Miracles" by Lee Strobel is a comprehensive exploration of the evidence and arguments surrounding the existence of miracles in the contemporary world. Here's a concise summary:

## **The Skeptic's Challenge:**

Lee Strobel, in his characteristic investigative style, begins his exploration of miracles by confronting the challenges head-on. To get a comprehensive view, he reaches out to Michael Shermer, the founder of Skeptic magazine and a prominent voice in the world of skepticism.

## **Michael Shermer's Perspective:**

- **Improbability of Miracles:** Shermer starts by emphasizing the inherent improbability of miracles. From a statistical standpoint, extraordinary events with extremely low probabilities don't typically occur, and when they seem to, they often have underexplored natural explanations.
- **Cognitive Biases:** Shermer points out that humans are prone to cognitive biases. These biases, such as confirmation bias (where individuals favor information that confirms their existing beliefs), can make people more inclined to attribute unexplained phenomena to divine intervention rather than seeking out natural explanations.
- **Natural Explanations:** According to Shermer, many events deemed "miraculous" can be explained through natural means if thoroughly investigated. For instance, spontaneous medical recoveries might be attributed to the body's own resilience, unknown biological factors, or even misdiagnoses.
- **Extraordinary Claims Require Extraordinary Evidence:** A cornerstone of skeptical thinking is that if someone claims something extraordinary (like a miracle), the evidence supporting that claim should also be extraordinary. Shermer believes that most miracle claims lack this caliber of evidence.

Strobel's interview with Shermer sets the stage for the rest of the book. By first presenting the skeptical viewpoint, Strobel ensures that the reader is aware of the primary objections to belief in miracles. This allows the subsequent sections to address these challenges directly, making the case for the existence of miracles in the face of skepticism.

## **Miracles in the New Testament:**

Lee Strobel recognizes that for many believers, the miracles described in the New Testament (NT) are foundational to their faith. Yet, skeptics often challenge the reliability of these accounts. To address this, Strobel investigates the historical accuracy and reliability of the NT miracle stories.

## **Key Points:**

1. **Historical Context:** One of the arguments made in favor of the reliability of the NT miracles is their historical context. The accounts were written relatively close in time to the events they describe, suggesting that there was little time for legendary embellishment.
2. **Multiple Attestations:** Many of the miracles in the NT are mentioned in multiple independent sources. This is significant in historical analysis, as events mentioned in multiple, independent sources are generally considered more likely to be historical.
3. **Eyewitness Accounts:** Some scholars argue that many of the miracle stories are based on eyewitness testimonies. This is based on certain textual clues, like the use of specific names and details that suggest firsthand knowledge.

4. **Criteria of Embarrassment:** Historians often use this criterion to assess the reliability of ancient texts. If a story is potentially embarrassing or counterproductive to the author's cause, it's less likely they would have invented it. Some miracles, like Jesus' crucifixion (a humiliating form of execution), fit this criterion.
5. **Scholars' Perspectives:** Strobel interviews various scholars who present arguments for and against the reliability of the NT accounts. While many scholars assert the authenticity and reliability of the accounts, others suggest that these stories were products of their time or were influenced by other cultural myths and legends.
6. **Miracles as Central Themes:** The centrality of miracles to the teachings and ministry of Jesus is emphasized. Miracles weren't just peripheral anecdotes; they were core to Jesus' message and identity. This raises the question of why, if they were fabrications, they would be so central to the early Christian narrative.
7. **Contradictions and Differences:** Strobel also addresses the challenges posed by apparent contradictions or differences in miracle accounts across different NT books. Scholars provide explanations, such as understanding the nature of oral traditions or recognizing the different purposes and audiences of each Gospel writer.

In this section, Strobel aims to provide a comprehensive and balanced overview of the scholarly debates surrounding the miracles in the New Testament. Whether one comes away convinced or remains skeptical, the intent is to offer an informed perspective on this critical aspect of Christian faith.

### **God's Fingerprints:**

In this segment, Lee Strobel focuses on personal experiences and events that many interpret as direct interventions from God. While these might not have the rigorous documentation of other types of evidence, they play a significant role in the personal faith journeys of countless individuals.

### **Key Areas:**

1. **Near-Death Experiences (NDEs):**
  - o Strobel delves into stories of individuals who claim to have had experiences of the afterlife during moments when they were clinically dead or close to death.
  - o These accounts often include feelings of peace, encounters with deceased loved ones, or a divine presence.
  - o While some scientists and skeptics attribute NDEs to brain chemistry or other physiological responses, others believe they provide a glimpse into the afterlife or a divine realm.
2. **Divine Interventions:**
  - o Strobel presents stories where people believe they've experienced divine protection or guidance in moments of crisis.
  - o Examples might include being saved from an accident in a seemingly miraculous way, or feeling a strong, inexplicable urge to avoid a situation that later proves to be dangerous.
  - o These events are often hard to quantify or prove but have profound impacts on the individuals involved.
3. **Answered Prayers:**
  - o Many believe that their prayers have been directly answered by God in miraculous ways.

- o Strobel shares testimonies of unexpected healings, providential provisions, or other events that occurred in response to fervent prayer.
  - o Skeptics might attribute these occurrences to coincidence, the placebo effect, or cognitive biases, while believers see them as evidence of a personal, interactive God.
4. **The Nature of Anecdotal Evidence:**
- o Strobel acknowledges the challenges associated with anecdotal evidence. Personal testimonies are deeply subjective and can be influenced by various factors.
  - o However, he also emphasizes the sheer volume and consistency of these stories across cultures and generations. For many, the cumulative weight of these testimonies is significant, even if individually they might be dismissed.

Throughout this section, Strobel provides a platform for individuals to share their personal encounters with the divine. While he recognizes the limitations of anecdotal evidence in making a comprehensive case for the miraculous, he underscores the importance of personal experiences in shaping individual beliefs and convictions.

### **Medical Documentation:**

In this part of the book, Lee Strobel explores instances where individuals have experienced medical healings that seem to defy natural or scientific explanations. The emphasis here is on cases that have been thoroughly documented by medical professionals.

### **Key Points:**

1. **Documented Cases:**
  - o Strobel presents several cases where individuals were diagnosed with medical conditions, often severe or terminal, and then experienced unexpected and unexplained recoveries.
  - o These aren't just stories of feeling better; they are situations where medical scans, tests, and other diagnostic tools confirmed an ailment and then later verified its inexplicable disappearance.
2. **Interviews with the Healed:**
  - o Individuals share their personal experiences, describing their initial diagnosis, their journey of faith and prayer, and the moment they realized they were healed.
  - o Many describe their healings as immediate and total, often after prayer or religious ceremonies, such as laying on of hands.
3. **Medical Professionals' Testimonies:**
  - o Strobel interviews doctors, surgeons, and other healthcare experts who treated the individuals or reviewed their medical records.
  - o Many of these professionals express their astonishment and admit they cannot provide a medical explanation for the observed healings. While they might not always attribute it to the divine, they acknowledge the unexplained nature of these recoveries.
4. **Skepticism and Scrutiny:**
  - o The book also touches on skepticism within the medical community regarding miraculous healings. Some argue that misdiagnoses, spontaneous remission, or the body's innate healing capabilities might explain some of these cases.

- o Strobel, however, emphasizes cases where these explanations seem insufficient, especially where extensive medical documentation exists.
5. **Impact on Belief:**
- o The emotional and spiritual impact of these healings on the individuals, their families, and even their medical practitioners is explored. Many describe a deepening of their faith, a renewed sense of purpose, or a call to share their story with others.

By focusing on medically documented healings, Strobel aims to bridge the gap between faith and empirical evidence. While individual interpretations may vary, the intent is to present cases that are not easily dismissed and that challenge the boundaries of what we understand as possible in the realm of healing.

### **Creation and the Universe:**

In this segment, Lee Strobel touches upon the profound mysteries and complexities of our universe, arguing that its very existence and the precise conditions allowing for life might point towards a purposeful design.

### **Key Points:**

1. **Fine-Tuning Argument:**
  - o Strobel presents the idea that numerous constants and variables in physics appear to be finely-tuned for life. Small alterations in these values could render the universe hostile or even impossible for life as we know it.
  - o Examples include the strength of gravitational forces, the rate of the universe's expansion, and the specific properties and ratios of fundamental particles.
2. **Cosmological Argument:**
  - o This philosophical argument states that everything that begins to exist has a cause, and since the universe began to exist (as supported by the Big Bang theory), it too must have a cause. This "First Cause" is often identified with God.
3. **Anthropic Principle:**
  - o This principle posits that the universe seems tailor-made for human life. Whether by necessity, chance, or design, the conditions of the universe are such that they allow for human existence.
4. **Alternative Explanations:**
  - o Strobel delves into counterarguments and alternative explanations. One such idea is the multiverse theory, which suggests that our universe is just one of countless universes, each with its own set of physical constants. If there are infinite universes, it's statistically probable that at least one (like ours) would have the right conditions for life.
5. **Philosophical and Theological Implications:**
  - o The idea that the universe might be designed carries significant implications. If true, it suggests purpose, intention, and a designer. Many see this as evidence for the divine or a higher power.
6. **Interviews with Experts:**

- o Strobel interviews cosmologists, physicists, theologians, and philosophers on both sides of the debate, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

By exploring the intricacies of the universe, Strobel taps into a profound sense of wonder shared by both the religious and the scientifically inclined. While conclusions vary, the exploration emphasizes the vastness, beauty, and mystery of the universe we inhabit.

### **Intellectual Challenges:**

Lee Strobel recognizes that believing in miracles and a benevolent deity raises challenging questions, especially in light of suffering and apparent divine inaction. He takes on these intellectual challenges head-on.

### **Key Areas of Discussion:**

#### **1. The Problem of Evil:**

- o Perhaps one of the most debated subjects in theology, Strobel grapples with the question: if God is all-powerful and all-loving, why is there suffering and evil in the world?
- o Answers from various theological perspectives are explored. Some argue that free will is a gift, but it also allows for human choices that result in suffering. Others suggest that suffering has a purpose, potentially for soul-making or spiritual growth.

#### **2. Divine Hiddenness:**

- o Why doesn't God make His presence more obvious? Why are there times when God seems silent, especially during moments of profound suffering?
- o Some scholars argue that overt evidence of God's existence might interfere with genuine free will. Others suggest that God's hiddenness might serve a purpose we don't fully understand, such as facilitating a deeper, more genuine search for the divine.

#### **3. Miraculous Interventions:**

- o If God can intervene with miracles, why doesn't He do so more often? Why are some prayers seemingly answered while others are not?
- o Theologians offer varied perspectives, including the idea that constant divine interventions might negate the natural order of the world. Others suggest that the nature of God's interaction with the world might be more intricate and multifaceted than humans can comprehend.

#### **4. Biblical Perspectives:**

- o Strobel looks at how the Bible addresses suffering. The Book of Job, for instance, delves deep into the question of undeserved suffering, and while it doesn't provide simple answers, it emphasizes trust in divine wisdom.
- o The New Testament, particularly through the figure of Jesus, also provides a lens to view suffering and divine intervention.

#### **5. Interviews with Scholars and Theologians:**

- o Engaging with theologians, philosophers, and other scholars, Strobel seeks to provide well-rounded insights into these tough questions. While definitive

answers are elusive, the discussions shed light on how different traditions and thinkers approach these challenges.

Through this section, Strobel acknowledges that belief in a divine entity and miracles doesn't sidestep the intellectual challenges posed by suffering and divine hiddenness. Instead, he provides a platform for thoughtful engagement with these age-old questions, emphasizing the depth and complexity of theological thought.

## **Final thoughts**

In wrapping up "The Case for Miracles," Lee Strobel seeks to tie together the various threads of evidence, argumentation, and testimony presented throughout the book.

### **Key Points:**

1. **Rational Belief:**
  - o Strobel emphasizes that belief in miracles is not an abandonment of reason. On the contrary, he posits that when one examines the evidence—both anecdotal and empirical—such belief can be a rational response to the data at hand.
2. **Cumulative Evidence:**
  - o Throughout the book, Strobel presents various forms of evidence: from personal testimonies of the miraculously healed to scholarly examinations of biblical accounts, from the intricacies of the universe's design to medically documented cases. He argues that while each piece of evidence might be debated individually, the collective weight of the evidence forms a compelling case for the miraculous.
3. **Skepticism and Belief:**
  - o Strobel acknowledges that skepticism is a natural and even valuable approach. He doesn't disparage those who doubt but rather invites them to consider the evidence presented.
  - o He emphasizes that skepticism and faith are not mutually exclusive; one can approach faith topics with a critical mind and still find compelling reasons to believe.
4. **Personal Reflection:**
  - o Strobel often integrates his personal journey from atheism to belief, highlighting that his conversion was significantly influenced by his investigative approach to these topics. His story serves as a testament to the idea that rigorous inquiry can lead to profound spiritual discoveries.
5. **Invitation to the Reader:**
  - o In the concluding remarks, Strobel extends an invitation to readers, both believers and skeptics, to continue the exploration. He encourages open-mindedness, further study, and personal reflection on the topics discussed.

In the conclusion, Strobel's aim is not to provide irrefutable proof of miracles but to make a case that belief in them is both reasonable and supported by a myriad of evidence. He acknowledges the complexities and challenges but posits that the journey of exploration, with all its questions and discoveries, is invaluable in itself.

**Conclusion:**

Lee Strobel's "The Case for Miracles" stands as an intellectual and spiritual beacon, shedding light on the intersection of faith, history, science, and philosophy. In an era where secular skepticism often challenges religious beliefs, Strobel meticulously crafts a multidimensional defense, not only of Christianity's tenets but also of the very essence of faith in the miraculous.

The very foundation of Christian belief — the New Testament accounts of miracles — is rigorously examined. Strobel does not offer a superficial affirmation; rather, he dives into the historical crucible, exploring the textual veracity, socio-cultural contexts, and the potential biases of recorded narratives. The result is a profound assertion: these aren't mere anecdotal tales but are grounded in historical verities that withstand rigorous scholarly scrutiny.

His exploration of the universe's creation is emblematic of the harmonious dance between theology and cosmology. Strobel underscores the idea that the universe, with its intricate fine-tuning, is not a product of serendipity but potentially bears the mark of intentional design. By navigating the sophisticated terrains of the cosmological and fine-tuning arguments, he beckons readers to contemplate a universe that's not just vast and mysterious but also purposefully designed.

Addressing the intellectual challenges that have perennially faced Christian theology, Strobel showcases a faith that does not cower in the face of hard questions but rises to meet them.

The issues of theodicy, divine hiddenness, and the apparent inconsistencies in miraculous interventions are not sidestepped. Instead, they are tackled head-on, emphasizing that faith is not a simplistic acceptance but a complex engagement with existential dilemmas.

Perhaps one of the most compelling segments of the book is the exploration of medically documented healings. Here, Strobel masterfully merges the empirical with the spiritual. By juxtaposing personal testimonies with medical attestations, he offers a powerful argument: that miracles aren't relegated to ancient scriptures but are tangible, contemporary phenomena that defy conventional explanations.

But what truly distinguishes "The Case for Miracles" is its unyielding commitment to intellectual honesty. Strobel's dialogues with skeptics, his willingness to present counterarguments, and his acknowledgment of the complexities inherent in faith underscore the book's authenticity. It's not a monologue of affirmation but a dialogue of exploration.

In synthesizing these multifaceted explorations, Strobel constructs an edifice of belief that is both rational and deeply spiritual. His work serves as a testament to the idea that faith in the Christian tradition is not a mere relic of bygone eras but remains vibrantly alive, substantiated by history, science, philosophy, and personal experience. "The Case for Miracles" challenges its readers to embark on a journey of intellectual and spiritual discovery, asserting that in the intricate dance of doubt and belief, there lies the profound beauty of faith.