

# *MIRACLES*

## *ALL*

# *AROUND US*

**JOHN VAN DIEST, COMPILER**



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*This book is dedicated to...*

**John and Ann Booth:** Friends whose monumental doctoral dissertation in seminary explained how and why God used the special revelation of miracles to accomplish His purposes. John lived a life of obedience to his Savior.

**Paul and Pam Johnson:** Friends whose life commitment and counsel God has used to encourage many in the faith, including me.

**Rod and Deanne Morris:** Editors par excellence, regularly taking the scribblings of authors and making written mosaics—thank you, Rod, for using your God-given skills reflected over scores of years on hundreds of books!

**Adrian Rogers:** Friend whose God-given gift of preaching drew thousands to pursue the miracle of Jesus.

**Bruce H. Wilkinson:** Friend whose pursuit and passion to experience miracles daily is refreshing and encouraging.



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# PREFACE

This is my second book on miracles, and I've often found myself pondering the question, what is our fascination with miracles? I have concluded that in a world becoming increasingly more violent and uncertain, we want to believe in something—or perhaps someone—bigger and more powerful than ourselves.

If you believe in miracles—or want to—consider this poll published in *Newsweek*:

## Most People Believe in Miracles

- Percentage of Americans who believe in divine miracles: 84%
- Percentage of Americans who believe in the reality of miracles described in the Bible: 79%
- Percentage of those who have personal experiences with miracles: 48%
- Percentage of those who know people who have: 63%
- Percentage of those who have prayed for a miracle: 67%
- Percentage of those who believe God or the saints cure and heal sick people who have been given no chance of survival by medical doctors: 77%

(*Newsweek*, May 1, 2000)

So you're not alone in your desire to believe in miracles! Here's what some well-known Christians have to say about miracles:

"Evidence from the Bible as well as personal experience convinces us that guardian angels surround us at times and protect us."

Billy Graham

"We wonder, with so many miraculous testimonies around us, how we could escape God."

*Max Lucado*

"Witnessing a miracle doesn't make it any more understandable. But I have witnessed one, and I know that miracles don't just change the course of events, they change hearts."

*David Hanson Bourke*

"A true miracle is something beyond man's intellectual or scientific ability to accomplish."

*Charles Ryrie*

Someone once said, "Coincidence is God's way of performing a miracle anonymously" and yet, ultimately, miracles are about God. Listen to what He says to Moses: "How long will they not believe in me, despite all the miracles I have done among them?" So a word of caution, lest we too easily dismiss them: Believing in miracles—and perhaps experiencing a miracle—has a lot to do with our hearts.

Speaking about miracles, C.S. Lewis said, "Seeing depends upon where you stand." My prayer for you as you read *Miracles All Around Us* is that you will be able to truly see.

*John Van Diest*

## Miracles of Destiny

I have been suspected of being what  
is called a Fundamentalist.  
That is because I never regard  
any narrative as unhistorical  
simply on the ground that it  
includes the miraculous.

*C.S. Lewis*

## Miracles of Destiny

Some miracles seem to have short-range benefit; others seem to have long-range importance. The destiny miracles produce consequences that set the stage for major or larger purposes. This progressive unfolding of individual miracles in the Gospel of John leads toward a greater purpose than each of the individual miracles (John 20:31).

In such cases the degree of significance of a particular miracle may be in its contribution to the larger purpose. If God's love for us is paramount—and it is—then it is no surprise that significant events and miracles are designed to express that love.

Most likely the accounts of miracle stories in this section, while individually important, have a larger “destiny” purpose for us to discover.

# People Love Secrets

DICK WOODWARD

We want to decipher hidden codes and unlock great mysteries. We want to find buried treasure and know the inside scoop. Whisper the word “secret” and people pay attention.

Maybe that’s part of the reason that a book called *The Secret* became such a national phenomenon, remaining on the *New York Times*’s bestseller list for years and selling zillions of copies. Written from a New Age-y perspective, it explores unseen dimensions of the universe and how they connect with events in our lives. It describes how our attitudes can help determine outcomes.

As psychologist Dr. Henry Cloud has put it, the enormous success of *The Secret* is intriguing on two counts. First, it shows the deep longing of so many in the world; they yearn to understand the universe and its mysteries. Second, it reveals people’s hunger for principles and practices that make life work.

Like Dr. Cloud, I’ve followed the huge response to *The Secret*. I’m particularly intrigued by it because my pastoral ministry for the past 40 years has been centered on what I call the “Four Spiritual Secrets.”

Oh, great, you say. Here comes an evangelical pastor puffin’

his own ideas, trying to catch the coattails of someone else's successful book. He's probably running around the country, preaching to happy-clappy crowds, trying to climb on the "secret" bandwagon.

Not really.

I'm not running anywhere. In fact, I've been stuck pretty much in one place for decades; I'm a quadriplegic. I can't even wipe my own nose. I can't do much of anything without help, except blink, think, talk, praise God, and pray. I can't go outside and contemplate the wonders of the universe, or even tilt my head back to look at the stars. I'm stuck.

But here's the wild paradox. Even though I'm stuck, I'm free.

As I'll tell you later, my paralysis wasn't the result of a sudden accident. Over time, I gradually lost the use of my legs, my arms, my whole body. Believe me, it was weird, terrifying, and depressing. You do not want this to happen to you.

But an absolute miracle came out of this horrible situation: In direct proportion to the gradual but relentless onset of my *disability*, the *ability* of God has showed up in my experience. In my weakness, I have a richer, more dynamic, and far-reaching life than I did when I was strong.

Just what is going on here?

One thing, really—the gift of God's mind-blowing grace and His peace in spite of my circumstances.

That's why I am so motivated to write this book. (Actually, I can't "write" anything; rather, I'm talking to my computer, and when it is happy and the voice recognition software works, it takes down my thoughts. If the computer is having a bad day, then I'm stuck again.)

But in spite of my sometimes uncooperative computer, I'm overwhelmed by a passion to share the four spiritual secrets with you. They've given me supernatural peace, joy, and a miraculous sense of purpose and meaning every single day, in spite of my

physical helplessness. They are the keys to a fruitful, purpose-filled journey in this world.

And though they may sound mysterious before we decode them, that's how all good secrets are. That's what I hope you'll discover in this little book. Here they are:

- I'm not, but He is.
- I can't, but He can.
- I don't want to, but He wants to.
- I didn't, but He did.

# Church Bells in the Kremlin

PHILIP YANCEY

*(Compiler's note: My original intention in this collection was to choose stories that were brief. I've included the two stories called "Church Bells in the Kremlin" and "Praying with the KGB" because of their uniqueness and the fact that they were miracles themselves! Unfortunately, the openness of Russia to the message of the Bible has reversed itself from those days when they seemed to welcome Christianity.)*

It would be hard to overstate the chaos found in the Soviet Union, a nation about to shed its historical identity as well as its name. One day the central bank ran out of money. A few days later the second largest republic seceded. A sense of crisis pervaded everything. Doctors announced the finest hospital in Moscow might close its doors in a month—no more cash. Crime was increasing almost 50 percent per year. No one knew what the nation would look like in a year—or even six months. Who would control the nuclear weapons? Who would print the currency?

Perhaps because of the chaos, the Supreme Soviet seemed delighted to meet with our delegation. After a full day of listening to rancorous complaints from breakaway republics, an

evening with nineteen foreign Christians probably seemed like a recess period.

When the letter proposing Project Christian Bridge went out in September 1991, the Supreme Soviet was the highest governing body in the nation, comparable to the U.S. Congress. By the time we arrived in Moscow, the Supreme Soviet was not doing what it was supposed to do. Five of the twelve republics had not bothered to send delegates. Most major decisions were being handed down as presidential decrees from Mikhail Gorbachev or, more significantly, from Boris Yeltsin of the Russian Republic.

We met with twenty committee chairmen and deputies in the Grand Kremlin Palace, a huge building built in the first half of the nineteenth century as a residence for the tsars. The palace, with its chandeliers, frescoed hallways, parquet floors, and decorative plaster moldings, still conveys a fine sense of grandeur. (On the way to the meeting we passed a park where stooped-over Russian women swept snow from the sidewalks with crude brooms of hand-tied straw. The contrast in an egalitarian state was stunning.)

The two groups, Supreme Soviet deputies and North American Christians, faced each other across long wooden tables. One end of the meeting room was dominated by a massive painting, in socialist realist style, of Lenin addressing a group of workers in Red Square. His face wore a severe, clench-jawed “we will right the world” expression.

Some of us could hardly believe the deputies’ warm welcome. From these very offices in the Grand Kremlin Palace, other Soviet leaders had directed a campaign against God and religion over the past seventy years that was unprecedented in human history. They stripped churches, mosques, and synagogues of religious ornaments, banned religious instruction to children, and imprisoned and killed priests. The government opened

forty-four antireligious museums, and published a national newspaper called *The Godless*.

Using government funds, first the League of Militant Atheists and then The Knowledge Society organized “un-evangelism” campaigns of lectures and personal witnessing with the specific aim of stamping out all religious belief. Vigilantes known as the “Godless shock brigades” went after the most stubborn believers.

Until the fall of 1990, rigorous atheism had been the official doctrine of the Soviet government. Now, exactly a year later, nineteen evangelical Christians were sitting across the table from the present leaders.

Konstantin Lubchenko, chairman of the Supreme Soviet, introduced his side of the table, joking amiably as he came to his vice chairman, a Muslim from the republic of Azerbaijan: “He follows Muhammad, not Jesus. Who knows, someday we may find out we all serve the same God.” The vice chairman, who looked like a Turkish bodybuilder squeezed into a suit two sizes too small, did not smile.

Lubchenko is a handsome man with an expressive, strong-boned face. He wore his hair swept back from his forehead as if he had run a brush through it once, taking no time for a part. He was gregarious and witty, often interrupting his fellow deputies with jokes and repartee.

The USSR Freedom of Conscience Law, adopted in October 1990, formally abolished restrictions on religious faith. Article 5 represents the most dramatic change in policy: “The state does not fund religious organizations or activity associated with the propaganda of atheism.” Government sponsorship of atheism campaigns are now illegal.

Nine months before, as a newly elected deputy, Lubchenko had visited the United States to observe democracy in action. He happened to book a room at the Washington Sheraton the week of the National Religious Broadcasters’ Convention, one

of the largest gatherings of evangelical Christians. As he stood in the lobby, adrift in a foreign land whose language and customs he did not know, the wife of Alex Leonovich, an NRB delegate, overheard him speaking Russian. The Leonoviches introduced themselves to Lubenchenko. They and Mikhail Morgulis, a Russian émigré, escorted the Soviet visitor around the capital and invited him to the next day's Presidential Prayer Breakfast, where an awed Lubenchenko met President George Bush and other government leaders.

A friendship developed between Lubenchenko and American Christians, and it was mainly through these contacts that Project Christian Bridge had come about. Just one week before our visit, the Supreme Soviet elected Lubenchenko as its chairman, which guaranteed us a cordial reception.

Our meeting with the deputies opened with brief statements from both sides. Our group, well aware of the ardent antireligious policies pursued by this state government for many years, began rather tentatively. We spoke up for freedom of religion and asked for the right to distribute Bibles and broadcast religious programs without restrictions.

Lubenchenko waved these opening remarks aside, as if to say, you're preaching to the converted here. "We need the Bibles very much," he said. "Is there a way to distribute them free instead of charging, so more people can get them?" I stole a glance at the mural of Lenin, wondering what he would have thought of these developments in his motherland.

After a few more comments John Aker, a pastor from Rockford, Illinois, spoke up. In preparation for this visit, our delegation members had urged each other to avoid any tone of triumphalism. We should approach the Soviets with respect, not offending them with direct references to the failures of their country. We should be honest about the weaknesses of the United States in general and the American church in particular.

In that spirit John Aker remarked on the resurgence of the Soviet church.

"Returning home from my last visit to your country, I flew over the city of Pittsburgh just as the sun was setting to the west," he said. "It was a beautiful sunset, and I photographed it from the window of the plane. As I did so, I realized that the sun was just then rising in the Soviet Union. Going down in America, but coming up on the Soviet Union.

"Please don't be fooled by us tonight. I believe in many ways the sun seems to be going down on the church in America. We have taken too much for granted in our country and we have grown complacent. But I believe the sun is rising on the church here. Reexamine your history. Examine your spiritual legacy. And I pray you will lead your people in the light."

The deputies would have none of it. One commented wryly, "Perhaps the setting sun does not symbolize the decline of the Western church, but rather the sinking of communism in Russia!" Other deputies laughed loudly. Lubchenko identified the speaker as a major general in charge of the Ministry of State Security.

The general continued, "In the past weeks I have been negotiating reductions in strategic nuclear weapons. I have attended many meetings with my American counterparts. The cuts we have made will make our world more secure, I believe. And yet I must say that this meeting with you Christians tonight is more important for long-term security of our nation than the meeting between our nations' presidents on eliminating nuclear weapons. Christianity can contribute much to our security as a people."

I checked the translation with the delegate beside me, who spoke Russian. Yes, I had heard right. The general really had said our meeting was more important than the START talks. A deputy from Byelorussia jumped in with warm praise for Christians who had responded so quickly to help victims of

the Chernobyl disaster. Other deputies nodded assent. Another Soviet asked about the possibility of opening Christian colleges in the USSR.

Our group began to detect a pattern that would become increasingly evident throughout our trip. Whenever we tried to inject a note of realism, our Soviet hosts would cut us off. They looked on the United States, with all its problems, as a shining light of democracy; they saw the Christian church as the only hope for their demoralized citizens.

The Soviet leaders voiced a fear of total collapse and anarchy unless their society could find a way to change at the core, and for this reason they had turned to us for help. Somewhere in government files there must exist a profile of American evangelicals: They are good citizens, by and large; don't meddle too much in politics; support their leaders; and have a strong work ethic. That citizen profile is sorely lacking in the USSR. And if God must come as part of the package, well, all the better.

One deputy quizzed us on the relationship between democracy and religion. "There is a direct tie," we responded. "Democracy is based on a belief in the inherent dignity of men and women that comes from their being created in the image of God. Furthermore, we also believe that governments are given divine authority to administer justice. In that respect, you leaders are agents of God." The deputies seemed to like that idea.

In general the Soviet deputies seemed bright, earnest, and deeply concerned about the problems outside the Grand Kremlin Palace. Most were young and energetic—a good thing since they had been meeting thirteen hours straight that day—and I thought it a shame that these deputies would likely find themselves shut out of politics as the Soviet Union continued to unravel.

As the evening grew late, Lubchenko asked one of the youngest deputies, an attractive woman in charge of cultural

affairs, to sum up the new attitude toward religion. "I am impressed with how freely you can talk about your faith," she said, softly but with deep emotion. "I envy you! We have all been raised on one religion: atheism. We were trained to believe in the material world and not God. In fact, those who believed in God were frightened. A stone wall separated these people from the rest.

"Suddenly we realized that something was missing. Now religion is open to us, and we see the great eagerness of young people. I envy those young people growing up today who can study religion. This is a hard time for us, when our ideals have been destroyed. We must explore religion, which can give us a new life and a new understanding about life."

When she finished, Mikhail Morgulis, the organizer of our trip, asked if we could stand and pray. Television cameramen switched on banks of lights and roamed the room, poking their camera lenses into the faces of praying Soviet deputies, drinking in this strange sight for the benefit, and probable bewilderment, of Soviet television viewers.

On our way out we posed with our hosts for photos in the great hall, and I could not help noticing a bookstand display featuring the film *JESUS* and copies of the Bible in Russian.

What had happened to the atheistic state? The change in attitude was unfathomable. I doubted whether the U.S. Congress would have invited these same evangelical leaders to consult with them on spiritual and moral values, and I certainly couldn't remember seeing Bibles for sale in the U.S. Capitol building.

We exited the Grand Kremlin Palace, and a chorus of bells rang out in the clear October air. The Revolution had silenced all church bells until a decree from Gorbachev made it legal for them to sound again. I saw an old woman wearing a *babushka* kneeling before a cathedral in prayer, an act that would have required immense courage a few months before. The irony struck

me: Within the walls of the Kremlin—officially atheistic until 1990—stand five separate gold-domed cathedrals. Is there another seat of government in all the world so crowded with churches?

A guide had pointed out a brick gate in the Kremlin wall still referred to as the “Savior Gate.” It got its name from a large gilded frame mounted above the opening in the wall. Before the Revolution the frame held a painting of Jesus; since then, it has hung empty.

I looked at my watch, still set on Chicago time. It was October 31, Reformation Day. The Reformation had not penetrated the borders of Russia during the sixteenth century or any other century.

Now, in the least likely of all places, at the least likely of all times, there were unmistakable signs of spiritual awakening. “It’s enough to make you a postmillennialist,” muttered one member of our group.

# Miracle of the Moscow Project

DOUG ROSS

My wife, Sandy, and I were awake early one morning in August, 1991. Lying in bed, we watched the coup in the former Soviet Union on TV as it began to unfold. I lay there waiting for Sandy to try to convince me to cancel my scheduled trip to Moscow later that week.

When she spoke it was to say, “Doug, you still have to go—your trip to Moscow is very important!”

The purpose was the Moscow International Book Fair. And my friend Jim Groen was planning a special rally to celebrate the distribution of four million Russian language New Testaments across the Soviet Union.

When I arrived in Moscow the book fair had been canceled. Several persons were dead, and a memorial for them was growing on the street where they died protesting for democracy. Boris Yeltsin was secured in the “Russian White House.” And our rally was on hold.

The rally was planned to take place in the Hall of Congress inside the walls of the Kremlin. The Communist party was meeting there to deal with the crises facing the government. All we could do was pray that somehow the rally could take place.

We didn't know the future of the Communist party itself was at stake—and that it was going to be voted out of existence. That happened just in time for our rally to take place. When we received word that our rally would take place, Jim Groen, Johnny Godwin, myself, and others were assisted by Soviet soldiers in carrying boxes of New Testaments into the Hall of Congress so that each of the ten thousand people who attended that night would get a copy.

The Moscow Project was born following the Moscow International Book Fair in 1989 and our successful distribution of five thousand New Testaments at the fair. When we returned home we knew that a great door of opportunity was opening and that Christian publishers should play a vital role. What could be more important than getting Scriptures into the hands of the people in this godless country?

While at the fair in 1989 I was asked time and again by pastors, soldiers, government officials, and people on the street, "Why are you here?" I kept answering, "The Bible is the best-selling book in all the world, and we intend to make it the best-selling book in your country."

Several of us met following the book fair to discuss where to go from there. We discussed the fact that four million people lived in Moscow—why not provide a New Testament to every person living in Moscow? We presented that idea to the ECPA Board of Directors, and they gave us the green light.

Countless organizations banded together and agreed to raise 50 percent of the two-million-dollar budget as well as handle the purchasing and printing. The involvement of International Bible Society came as a result of a "chance" meeting I had with Jim Powell—then president of IBS. I suggested it would be great if they could partner with us and raise 50 percent of the budget. A few weeks later Jim called and said, "We'll do it."

Christian retailers across the country wrapped our label

around a coffee can and began to collect money. Churches took offerings. Other organizations across the world helped in a variety of ways.

During the Moscow Book Fair in 1989, we were asked to meet with several government officials. I recall that four or five of us walked over to a small building on the fairgrounds and were welcomed into a sterile conference room. One of the officials spoke: "What you are doing is illegal." This referred to our giving away New Testaments in our booth. I answered that I knew this. There was a cold silence in the room, and I asked, "But would you like to have one of our New Testaments?"

The official smiled and said yes. We had brought a copy for each man in the room. We were refused permission to distribute New Testaments at the fair in 1989. We shipped them anyway, realizing they might just disappear. They didn't, and we handed them out to lines of people throughout the fair. Dale Randolph and the World Bible Translation Center had provided the testaments for fair distribution. When the testaments were gone, we collected fifteen thousand names, and Dale shipped in New Testaments and saw to it that they were mailed within Russia to every person requesting them.

Miracles happen when those who follow Christ work together. All too often the world sees our divisions—not our common bond in Christ. Miracles require determined followers of Jesus Christ to act. We can lower a man through the roof for healing. We can simply ask to see or be healed. But we have to act. It is most unusual for a trade association like the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association to take on a project like this. I doubt it has ever happened before or since. That in itself was a miracle.

At the end of the project, after every bill was paid, we had a surplus of \$10,000. We sent that money to Peter Dyneka for his ministry establishing and nurturing churches in Russia.

At least ten years later, I was listening to a speaker at our annual banquet at the Frankfurt International Book Fair when the speaker told the story of Russian Orthodox priests going from tank to tank in the streets of Moscow handing out New Testaments to the soldiers in the tanks. She credited this simple action on the part of the priests—as did others—as possibly what caused the tanks not to open fire. What she didn’t know at the time was that those New Testaments were the result of the Moscow Project—provided by the very people she was speaking to.

A miracle? Yes, a project unusually blessed by God!