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_The Healer from Nazareth_ is Eric Eve’s second monograph, appearing seven years after the publication of his first book, _The Jewish Context of Jesus’ Miracles_ (JSNTSup 231; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). Whereas the two books to a large extent deal with the same basic issues—early Judaism, miracles, and the historical Jesus—they are also quite different in scope and character. Eve’s first book focused on the context of Jesus’ miracles, considered mainly literary evidence, and—being the revised edition of the author’s doctoral thesis—contained a wealth of detailed arguments and references intended for scholarly colleagues in the field. _The Healer from Nazareth_ instead concentrates on Jesus’ own miracles within their historical context, combines the literary evidence more expressly with insights from social-scientific studies of healers and healing, and is aimed at a wider readership, including “undergraduates, clergy and laity who are taking their study of the New Testament a little further” (vii). In addition, while the main issues and the method are thoroughly historical-critical, in his new book Eve also devotes some space to considering possible theological implications of his results.

After an introduction that raises several important problems, such as the general historical reliability of the Gospels, the definition of “miracle,” and the method to be employed in the book, Eve devotes two chapters to conceptions of miracle-working in
Jesus’ context—Jewish and non-Jewish, with an expected emphasis on the former (chs. 1–2). These two chapters, which in fact have the appearance of a single chapter split up for editorial reasons, are those that most clearly build on Eve’s previous research in *The Jewish Context of Jesus’ Miracles*. As in that book, but with less technical jargon, the reader learns about miracles and miracle-workers as described above all in Philo, Josephus, *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. A special section is devoted to demonology in 1 Enoch, Jubilees, the Scrolls and other sources as a possible background for Jesus’ miracles.

The next chapter (ch. 3) introduces a social-scientific perspective on healing. This involves the typical distinctions between disease and illness and between curing and healing, but also the recognition of the three sectors of any society’s health-care system: the professional sector, the popular sector, and the folk sector. Jesus is categorized as a healer of illness in the folk sector. His extraordinary success in this capacity, Eve argues, may have resulted from Jesus’ dedication to a role coherent with the expectations of his society.

Eve next turns to consideration of the sources for reconstructing a picture of the historical Jesus’ miracles (ch. 4). He arrives at the conclusion that the Synoptic Gospels are the most relevant sources. Pride of place is given to the Gospel of Mark, which Eve acknowledges as the earliest extant Gospel, while he doubts the existence of Q. This judgment motivates a comparatively extensive analysis of the function of miracles in the Markan narrative (ch. 5), both in what Eve calls the “surface narrative” and with regard to the more hidden, symbolic level of the story. The outcome of this analysis is, not surprisingly, that “Mark uses his miracle stories in a skilful way to further his narrative and theological purposes” (116) and that the Gospel account cannot, therefore, be read as a straightforward report of historical events. Moreover—and this may be of greater interest to a scholarly reader—Eve identifies a number of characteristics of the “nature miracles” that distinguish these from healings and exorcisms within the Markan narrative, thus providing a basis for viewing them as a special category not only from a modern point of view but also from Mark’s perspective.

We then arrive at the climactic chapter “Healing and Exorcism in the Ministry of Jesus” (ch. 6). Here Eve summarizes the (primarily Markan) evidence for Jesus’ activity as a healer and exorcist, focusing on “general impressions” rather than on individual episodes and sayings, and places it within a discussion of first-century Galilee and Jesus’ eschatological message. He concludes that Jesus’ healings and exorcisms were probably perceived as the deeds of an eschatological prophet and as “a symbolic enactment of the eschatological kingdom of God” (144). On the other hand, most of the “nature miracles” and all of the resuscitation miracles constitute what Eve calls “anomalous miracles,” that
is, miracles that contradict laws of nature and thus cannot, from a historical-critical point of view, have occurred. Eve sets out to explain how these manifestly unhistorical episodes may have come into existence (ch. 7). He suggests that the “nature miracles,” while in some cases possibly containing a historical nucleus, may have derived the anomalous elements of their present shape from the primitive Christian conviction that Jesus had surpassed the achievements of the Old Testament prophets; thus, for example, the episode about the feeding in the desert may have been modeled on the episode about Elisha’s similarly miraculous feeding. The resuscitation miracles may likewise have come into existence as emulations of the stories told about Elijah and Elisha, who were also thought to have raised people from the dead.

Finally, in the concluding chapter (ch. 8), Eve recapitulates his results, lays out briefly their historical implications, and then turns to some possible theological consequences of the results. Among other things, Eve here discusses the relevance of his results for the doctrine of the incarnation, for the historical reliability of the Gospels, and for a contemporary Christian worldview—all of it in a most careful and balanced way.

Eve has managed to draw together, as he himself puts it, “what some may consider a bewildering variety of approaches” (141) into an impressively coherent whole. The author writes pedagogically, discreetly explaining terms and concepts with which the average reader may not be familiar, but never becomes patronizing or over-simplifying. Eve takes unambiguous positions, above all in historical-critical matters and to a less degree in relation to theological questions, all the while exhibiting an attitude marked by humility and respect toward those who may not share his opinions. Without letting issues of method eclipse the substance of the argument, the entire book is clearly marked by methodological awareness, and several important questions of method are briefly dealt with in their proper places. The present reviewer also finds the overall argument of the study, and its conclusion, broadly convincing. All these things make The Healer from Nazareth an enjoyable read and a fine work of learning.

There is one area of interrelated issues in which the present reviewer disagrees with the author. As mentioned above, Eve does not accept the two-source hypothesis and the existence of Q but seems to remain agnostic with regard to the Synoptic problem apart from the acceptance of Markan priority. In Eve’s opinion, “very little will depend on whether Matthew and Luke independently drew their double-tradition material from Q or whether Luke obtained it from Matthew” (84). This, in my view, is to underestimate the importance of various solutions to the Synoptic problem. It is certainly true that, as Eve puts it, “even if Q did exist … any useful Q material can equally well be gleaned from Matthew or Luke” (91), but this truth must not be allowed to darken the similarly valid insight that the evidential value of such material for a reconstruction of the historical
Jesus is largely dependent on whether Q existed or not. For an illustration of this point, one may consider Eve’s treatment of Matt 12:28/Luke 11:20, which is unique among Jesus’ sayings in the Gospels by explicitly linking the exorcisms of Jesus to the kingdom of God. Here Eve leans toward the opinion that the saying, which on the two-source hypothesis constitutes independent confirmation of what appears to be implicit in Mark’s narrative tradition, rather originated as Matthean redaction of Mark 3:27 (123, 131). It seems to be the same skeptical stance toward the existence of Q that lies behind Eve’s almost total disregard for what is arguably the most important saying for understanding how Jesus viewed his own miracles, that is, Matt 11:4–6/Luke 7:22–23. This saying is only mentioned a few times in passing (47, 57, 74, 84), and Eve has elsewhere expressed his inclination to view it as a Matthean creation.¹ Not only would a different evaluation and in-depth consideration of this saying have reinforced Eve’s conclusions, but it would also have opened up the possibility of saying a few more things about Jesus’ interpretation of his miracles in the light of the book of Isaiah and about his own role as the Coming One, the Anointed One of the Spirit.

In no way are these critical remarks meant to obscure the splendid qualities of The Healer from Nazareth. It is a book for which the author is to be congratulated and that is warmly recommended to scholar and student alike.