

# **THE MIRACULOUS TODAY**

**Miracles, Tongues, and Healing**

*G. Michael Cocoris*



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# Introduction

Many churches today are talking about the miraculous. They begin with the truth about God. He is an all-powerful, miracle-working God. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Holy Spirit gives supernatural gifts to believers. They point to the Bible. It is full of miracles. They claim they have experienced the supernatural working of God. Therefore, they say, “God is performing miracles today.”

More specifically, here is what they teach:

Believers today should expect the miraculous. After all, in the Bible, God is always working miracles. God is also working in supernatural ways today. For example, He supernaturally provides money (provided, of course, that you give money to the preacher first).

God supernaturally speaks to people today. He communicates directly with individuals, telling them what He wants them to do. Some have the spiritual gift of the “word of knowledge,” whereby God gives one believer a message for another person.

God gives people the supernatural gift of the spirit, especially the gift of tongues. There are other supernatural gifts, but most receive the gift of speaking in tongues.

God miraculously heals people. He gives the gift of healing to some individuals and He heals people if they have enough faith.

God works miracles to convince unbelievers to come to Christ. He supernaturally tells believers which unbelievers they are to win to Christ. God works miracles to win people to Christ.

Not all who believe that God is working miracles today agree on all of these issues. For example, some insist that speaking in tongues is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Others teach that speaking in tongues is just one of the gifts of the Spirit; it is a prayer language. Nevertheless, a large and growing segment of the church preaches, teaches, and seemingly experiences the miraculous.

Millions are persuaded that God is working in these miraculous ways today, just as He did in biblical times. Many, however, are skeptical. There are two problems with this teaching about the miraculous. Upon close examination, some so-called “miracles” in the Bible were not miracles after all. More importantly, a careful exposition of the Scripture indicates that what is being taught in these churches about miracles is not biblical at all!

What does the Bible teach concerning the miraculous? This is not just an abstract, theological question. There are ramifications for everyday living. This discussion comes down to practical issues such as: Does God speak today? How does He speak? Does God work today? What does He do? How does He work? Does He heal? How does He win people to Christ?

Each of these topics needs to be explored. Let’s begin with an overview of the miraculous in the Bible, which will answer the question, “Should you expect a miracle today?”





# SHOULD YOU “EXPECT A MIRACLE”?

The camera focuses on his face. With a reassuring smile, the self-assured TV evangelist exhorts the viewers to “expect a miracle.” Testimonies are given of ordinary people who expected the extraordinary and experienced it. Scripture is quoted to support the supposition that God works miracles today. The message is explicitly clear: “You, yes you, ordinary everyday Joe or Jane Christian, should expect a miracle.”

The slogan has caught on around America. I have seen plaques on walls, signs on desks, bumper stickers on cars as well as books and booklets, all proclaiming “Expect a Miracle.” Christians are flocking to churches offering music, a message, and miracles.

The pressure is on today. Those not experiencing the miraculous are made to feel that they are missing something. If you are not witnessing “signs and wonders,” you are missing the blessing of God. You are missing out. You are not measuring up.

Should you expect a miracle? Are miracles supposed to be part and parcel of the believer’s everyday experience? To answer the question of whether or not believers should expect daily miracles, two questions must be answered 1) What is a miracle? and 2) How often did they occur in the Bible?

## The Definition of a Miracle

*Ordinary Work* Before defining a miracle, it is important to note that the Bible represents God as working in His world. According to the Scripture, what people call the “law of nature” is the ordinary working of God in the natural world. For example, in Colossians 1, Paul says that in Christ, “all things consist” (Col. 1:17). The Greek word translated “consist” means “to hold together.” Christ holds together creation. He is “upholding all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3).

Thus, the natural world is a *sign* pointing to God (Ps. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:20). It is also a marvel and a *wonder* (Job 26:1-14). In this sense, everything is miraculous and marvelous.

Deism teaches that God created the world, wound it up like a clock and left it to run itself. He is detached from it. Natural law runs the universe. According to the Bible, the deistic idea of God is simply not true. God runs the universe; He is working in His world—all the time.

*Extraordinary Work* What, then, is a miracle? The Greek word translated “miracles” (Heb. 2:4) means “power.” The most basic observation concerning a miracle is that it is a manifestation of power. The power may be divine (Acts 2:22) or devilish and demonic (2 Thess. 2:9).

The way the Bible uses the word “miracle” is more than just “power.” The Hebrew word translated “miracle” in Judges 6:13 means “extraordinary.” It also means “wonder,” but the root idea is that which is distinguished from the ordinary.

There is more. In both the Old and New Testaments, the Bible calls miracles “signs and wonders.” A miracle is a sign in that it points to something beyond itself. It is a wonder in that it causes amazement or astonishment in those who observe it.

*Therefore, a miracle is the extraordinary manifestation of supernatural power, for the purpose of pointing to a truth (or a lie, as shown in 2 Thess. 2:9) with the result of producing human wonderment.*

The biblical picture of a miracle is the extraordinary manifestation of a power *outside the ordinary* course of events. Two worlds exist side by side and, on occasion, someone in one of them reaches into the other.

Life underwater is an illustration. When undisturbed, life under the surface of the water has a “normal” course of its own. If, however, a man standing on the bank throws a stone or a hook into the water, effects are produced which would be unexpected and extraordinary. To the creatures living underwater, these events are miracles that cause them to wonder.

The two worlds, above and below the water, are distinct from one another, but there is no barrier between them; they are actually in contact. The spiritual world is as close to us as the air is to the water. God, angels, the devil, and his demons can move from one world to the other. When that happens, “there is no suspension or modification of any law; it is simply that, as Sir George Stokes supposes in the case of a miracle, a new agency has interposed” (Stokes, *ISBE*, vol. 3, pp. 2063-64).

There are ramifications of this concept: 1) A miracle may be a deviation from a known law, such as the Resurrection. 2) A miracle may *not* be a deviation from a known law, such as God causing it to rain in answer to Elijah’s prayer. The issue, in that case, was timing. 3) Often, a human agent is involved, that is, miracles occur at the command or the prayer of someone. The walls of Jericho could have fallen over by nothing more than an earthquake, but, in that case, it was at the precise moment of the blowing of a trumpet.

In all cases, whether a natural law was used or not or whether a human agent was used or not, the basic idea is that a miracle is the extraordinary manifestation of supernatural power. The supernatural power may be divine or demonic.

## **The Number of Miracles**

How often did miracles occur in the Bible? To answer that question, simply survey the various periods of history in the Scripture.

*Primeval Age: Creation to Abraham* The first period is the Primeval Age, extending from creation to Abraham. There were four miracles during this period: Creation, the Flood, the confusion of languages, and the translation of Enoch.

Frankly, to evaluate miracles in the daily lives of people, this period should be excluded. Granted, there were miracles during this time, but these miracles were in a class by themselves. They were not performed through a human agent and they are not the type anyone would expect in daily life. God is not going to create the earth again until He creates the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:1). Nor is He going to judge the whole earth again, as He did with the Flood, until the time of the Tribulation and the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 3:10). God is not going to confuse languages again; He has already done that. And no one would claim that God duplicates the Enoch episode all the time!

Is it not interesting that from creation to Abraham, a period of thousands of years even by conservative estimates, there were only four miracles?

*Patriarchal Age* The period of the Patriarchs begins with the call of Abraham about 2100 BC and ends with the death of the last patriarch, Jacob. The book of Genesis, however, extends beyond Abraham through the life of Joseph, who died in 1806 BC. From Genesis 12 to Genesis 50, that is, from the call of Abraham to the death of Joseph, was around 300 years.

How many miracles occurred during the period of the Patriarchs? It depends on what is considered a miracle. Counting everything that could be called miraculous or a miracle, there were eight miracles during the period of the Patriarchs, including the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the birth of Isaac, and the turning of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt. God does not exactly destroy cities by fire, make 90-year-old women pregnant, and turn people to salt daily. Nevertheless, counting everything, even possibly miraculous, during the period of the Patriarchs, there were eight miracles in 300 years.

All eight happened during Abraham's lifetime, although not all eight happened to Abraham (see the miracle of Hagar's Well in Gen. 21:14-21). In other words, there were eight miracles in about 100 years, averaging about one miracle every 12 years. Therefore, though a few miracles occurred during this period, it was not a period of miracles.

Between the death of Abraham in 1992 BC and the call of Moses in 1447 BC, there are no recorded miracles in the Scripture. There were eight miracles in the space of 100 years. Then there were no miracles for 545 years.

*The Exodus and the Conquest* The first season of the supernatural was during the time of Moses and Joshua. The call of Moses occurred about 1447 BC and the conquest ended about 1393 BC. This period lasted about 53 years.

The first great miracle worker in the Bible was the mighty man Moses. During his 40 years of ministry, there are 33 recorded miracles, including the burning bush, the 10 plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the cloud by day, and the fire by night, the supply of water, manna and quail, the Ten Commandments written on stone by God, a judgment of death, a donkey speaking, and the death of Moses, which are 20 of the 33.

Moses' successor, Joshua, followed in his path. The Conquest took place in seven years (Josh. 14:7, 10). During that brief period, the Bible records six miracles, three of which are the victories in battles at Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon. As Moses crossed the Red Sea on dry land, so Joshua crossed the Jordan with the waters miraculously pushed back. In one of the biggest miracles since the Creation and Flood, the sun stood still.

During the periods of the Exodus and the Conquest, a period of about 53 years, there were 40 miracles, which is less than one miracle per year.

*Judges* The next period of Bible history was the period of the Judges. Joshua died about 1390 BC. Saul was crowned king in 1043 BC. This period, then, covers 347 years.

What happened during the period of the Judges of a miraculous nature? Basically, after the death of Joshua, miracles ceased. It might be argued that there were a few miracles during this period, such as Gideon's fire rack or Gideon's fleece or Samson's destruction of the Philistines, but there was nothing like the miracles of Moses and Joshua's time, either in magnitude or number. At best, there were a few miracles in 350 years.

*The United Kingdom* The same could be said for the period of the United Kingdom. Saul became king in 1043 BC and the kingdom was divided in 931 BC. For those 112 years, there was not much miraculous activity.

*The Divided Kingdom* The period of the Divided Kingdom extended from 931 BC to 586 BC. There was not another series of miracles until the ministry of Elijah, which began about 858 BC. Thus, from the death of Joshua about 1390 BC to the beginning of the next period of miracles, 532 years passed with virtually no miracles.

The second season of the supernatural was during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Dating this duo is difficult because exact dates are not given. Elijah and Elisha ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel from 858 BC until about 794 BC (Elijah 858-852 BC, and Elisha 852-794 BC). During these 60-plus years, these two men worked wonders.

How many miracles are attributed to these two depends on what is counted. Scroggie gives Elijah and Elisha eleven each. Bullinger points to Elisha's request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (2 Kings 2:9, 15) and concludes Elijah performed eight and Elisha sixteen. Herbert Lockyer lists ten during the ministry of Elijah and 13 during the ministry of Elisha. Therefore, in the space of about 60 years, there were about 22 to 24 miracles, averaging no more than one miracle every two years.

After Elijah and Elisha, there were only a few miracles, very few. Uzziah was struck with leprosy and Hezekiah's life was lengthened. Jonah had a whale of a ride. Daniel slept with lions and the three Hebrew children survived the fiery furnace, but from the death of Elisha (794 BC) until the ministry of Christ, there were not many miracles.

There were only two periods of miracles in the Old Testament: Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Elisha. Furthermore, many of the miracles of the Old Testament were miracles of judgment.

*Christ and the Apostles* There was one other period of miracles in the Bible. During the ministry of Christ and for at least part of the period of the ministry of the Apostles, miracles were once again performed. Christ began His ministry about 27 AD and the Apostles worked miracles until about 60 AD. So, for a period of about 30 years, miracles occurred.

Jesus Christ said that John the Baptist was the greatest prophet who ever lived. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and fulfilled the role of being the forerunner of the Messiah. He came in the spirit and power of Elijah. Yet, John, the Baptist did not perform miracles. For that matter, neither did Jesus Christ for the first 30 years of His life!

After His temptation and baptism, Jesus worked many miracles. Not all of them are recorded in the New Testament. Matthew alludes to 12 occasions when Jesus performed a number of wonderful works (Mt. 4:23-24; 8:16; 9:35; 10:1, 8; 11:4-5, 11:20-24; 12:15; 14:14, 14:36; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14). Many authorities count 35 miracles performed by Christ Himself. These are usually divided into three categories: miracles of healing, miracles of resurrection, and miracles of nature. There were other miracles during the time, such as the Virgin Birth.

In the Old Testament, periods of miracles were begun by one man followed by another, as in the case of Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Elisha. Likewise, in the New Testament, the season of miracles inaugurated by Christ is followed by the Apostles.

The book of Acts is the record of some of the acts of some of the Apostles. Not all the miracles of all the Apostles are listed. Luke mentions at least six instances of miracles by the Apostles as well as Stephen and Philip (Acts 28:43; 5:12, 15; 16, 6:8; 8:6-7, 13; 14:3; 19:11-12). Nine specific miracles are recorded. There were other miracles during this period, such as the death of Ananias and Sapphira and the miraculous prison releases of Peter and Paul.

In a period of about 30 years, from about 27 AD to about 60 AD, Jesus and the Apostles worked many miracles. Of the three periods of miracles in the Bible, this was the period of highest concentration. Counting the specific miracles and the references to occasions when a number of miracles occurred at one time, there were 12 individual miracles or days of miracles in 30 years, an average of about one every six months. Of course, the concentration was greater during Christ's ministry and less during the time of the book of Acts.

The miracles done by Jesus (Acts 2:22) and by the Apostles (Mk. 16:17-20) were to confirm their message. They healed to relieve suffering, but that was secondary. The primary purpose of miracles was to authenticate the message of Jesus as the Messiah. That is why they are called "signs." They pointed to something else: the message.

**Summary:** According to the biblical record, miracles, which are an extraordinary manifestation of supernatural power, were rare.

The subject of miracles must be kept in a biblical perspective. Rationalists explain them away. To do so is not accurate. Some believers try to expand them. That is not appropriate either. The biblical balance is to recognize that miracles do occur, but they are not an everyday occurrence.

In the approximately 2100 years from Abraham to the Apostles, there were only three periods of miracles: Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and the Apostles. Each period lasted less than one hundred years. Furthermore, during the periods of miracles, on the average, there was only one miracle every six months to two years. Therefore, in the Bible, there are only three periods of miracles and, even then, miracles were not an everyday occurrence. As Dr. Charles Smith has said, "God never intended for signs and wonders to be characteristic of the daily life of believers in any age."

From a biblical perspective, not all "miracles" are of God. Jesus said, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Mt. 7:21). In the future, the Antichrist and the False Prophet will do signs and wonders. In the Gospels, the expression "signs and wonders" is only used twice (Mt. 24:24; Mk. 13:22). Both references are to the Lord's statement that "false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect." This is a reference to the False Prophet during the Tribulation. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul says the Antichrist will come "with all power, signs, and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9).

Should you "expect a miracle"? If that means, should believers expect God to work extraordinary miracles in their lives *daily*, the answer is, "No!" God never intended for that to happen.

Some argue that the God of the Bible is an all-powerful, miracle-working God. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The Bible is loaded with miracles. The Apostles did signs and wonders. Sign gifts are given to believers. Therefore, they say, of course you should expect a miracle.

The issue is not that simple. Granted, God is all-powerful and He works wonders, but He has *never* done so *daily*. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but that is a statement about His *person*, not His *program*. The Bible contains miracles, but even in the Bible, miracles did not occur *every day*.

By the way, what kind of miracle am I to expect? Can I expect to survive being cast bound into a fiery furnace? How about a burning house or a burning car? Can I expect to

survive being cast overboard and staying underwater for three days and nights? Or can I survive on top of the water by walking on it? Just to say that God *can* work miracles or *did* work miracles in the past does not mean He will or is doing so today.

That sounds as if believers should not expect God to work in their lives, but that is not true either. Perhaps there are “levels” of miracles. The ordinary working of God could be called a miracle, but the Bible seems to reserve that term for the extraordinary working of God. The Hebrew word translated “miracle” in Judges 6:13 means “extraordinary.”

At the same time, a miracle is anything done by divine power to point to a divine truth with the result of producing human wonderment. God works. God exercises His power in the world. He does this in a variety of ways. Anytime God exercises His power, it is a miracle. Thus, there are:

Miracles over nature

Miracles of judgment (destruction of cities and people)

Miracles of mercy (healing)

Miracles of timing (such as rain)

Miracles in believers’ lives (conversion, power for living)

Should you expect God to work? Yes. God works; yea, God manifests His power every time He regenerates someone (Rom. 1:16). He works in His people—with power—daily. Paul speaks of believers being “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy” (Col. 1:11). Believers are strengthened by God’s glorious power, but what are they strengthened by God’s glorious power to do? This is not power to work extraordinary miracles. The text says it is God’s power to enable believers to *be patient with joy!* That is God working. It is the daily working of God in the life of believers. It is not what we normally think of as God working “miracles,” but it is *God working in our lives daily.*

Elisha witnessed a miracle—an ax head floated on water. Candidly, I do not expect that kind of miracle today, but I do expect God to work. If I was in a fishing boat and I dropped my pen overboard in shallow water, I would not expect it to float. I would look for it. I would ask God to help me find it. I would expect Him to help me do that. I would also expect Him to give me patience while I’m looking for it and grace if He chooses not to let me find it.

You need to know this to 1) trust the Lord to work in your life and 2) to avoid fraud, fakery, and false claims.

Be all that as it may, surveying the miraculous in the Bible does not answer all the questions about the miraculous today. What about spiritual gifts? In the New Testament, God gave spiritual gifts to believers. What are they and are they in operation today?

# DOES GOD SPEAK TODAY?

From talking to him, it was immediately obvious that this young man not only knew Jesus Christ, but he was deeply committed to Him. At the time, he was working at a “secular” job. When I asked about his future plans, he informed me that he was planning to enter the ministry. What was surprising was the way he arrived at that decision. He explained that in a church service, another believer with the gift of the “word of knowledge” received a message from the Lord informing him that he was to preach. God directly revealed to one Christian that another brother was to enter the ministry.

That kind of testimonial raises several issues. First, it brings up the area of spiritual gifts. What are they? Are they working today? Secondly, it also involves a theological question, “Does God speak today? If so, “How?” Many claim they receive messages directly from the Lord. Does God speak today—directly to people?

To answer these questions, the spiritual gifts in general and the speaking gifts, in particular, must be examined.

## The Spiritual Gifts

*The Number of Spiritual Gifts* Three chapters list spiritual gifts: Romans, 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 12:28-30, and Ephesians 4:11.

Romans 12:6-8	1 Corinthians 12:8-10	Ephesians 4:11
Prophecy	Word of Wisdom	Apostle
Ministry	Word of Knowledge	Prophet
Teaching	Faith	Evangelist
Exhorting	Healing	Pastor/teacher
Giving	Working of miracles	
Leading (administration)	Prophecy	
Showing mercy	Discerning of spirits	
	Tongues	
	Interpretation of tongues	
	1 Corinthians 12:28-30	
	Apostle	
	Prophet	
	Teacher	
	Miracles	
	Healings	
	Helps	
	Administrations (leading)	
	Tongues	
	Interpretation of tongues	

These three chapters list 29 spiritual gifts, but there is duplication. There are only 18 different gifts. Prophecy and teaching are the only gifts to appear in all three chapters. Apostleship, administration, and helps are mentioned in two of the three.

*The Types of Gifts* The 18 different spiritual gifts can be divided into three categories. The New Testament itself makes the distinction.

1. Speaking Gifts. Peter says, “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever, Amen” (1 Pet. 4:10-11). Peter says there are *speaking* gifts and *ministering* (serving) gifts. Speaking gifts include the gifts of publicly ministering the Word (“oracles of God”), such as apostle, prophet, teacher, pastor/teacher, exhortation, word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, and evangelist.

2. Serving Gifts. Serving gifts include gifts such as administration, giving, mercy, serving, helps, and perhaps faith and discernment.

3. Sign Gifts. Mark 16 mentions a third category, sign gifts. After Jesus commands the *Apostles* to preach the gospel (Mk. 16:15-16), He says, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name, they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues, they will take up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly it will be no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk. 16:17-18). Jesus speaks of “signs” including miracles such as casting out demons, speaking in tongues, and healing. Paul calls miracles, tongues, and healing spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:28-30). Thus, the sign gifts are miracles, tongues, and healing.

When Jesus said these signs would follow “those who believe,” He did not mean that every person who believed in Him would be able to drink poison and live to tell about it. Mark goes on to say that after the ascension, the *Apostles* performed these miracles (see “they” in verse 20, which is a reference to the Apostles). The reason Jesus said “those who believe” is because earlier, He had rebuked them for their unbelief (Mk. 16:14).

The Apostles had all three of these gifts (miracles, healing, and tongues), and possibly more. Paul worked miracles (Acts 13:8-11), healed people (Acts 14:9-10), and spoke in tongues (1 Cor. 14:18). He speaks of signs of an apostle and mentions signs, wonders, and mighty deeds (2 Cor. 12:12).

Mark adds, “They went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen” (Mk. 16:20). In other words, the purpose of the sign gifts was to confirm the Word. Hebrews 2:3-4 is similar to Mark 16:15-20.

To sum up, Jesus gave the *Apostles* the power to work miracles, called signs, *to confirm the message* He told them to preach. By the way, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth was a “Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him” (Acts 2:22). The purpose of miracles, signs, and wonders in the ministry of Jesus was confirmation.

*The Ranking of Gifts* Paul ranks the gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, he says, “God has appointed these in the church; first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that, miracles then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.” In this verse, Paul not only lists some of the gifts in the universal church, he ranks them in order of descending value. That is the significance of the words “first ... second .... after that .... then.” The first and foremost gift is that of apostle. The second most important gift is prophet and the third most important gift is teacher. After that, there are other gifts, but they are not ranked.



Paul says every member of the body has a gift (1 Cor. 12:7) and every member is important and necessary (1 Cor. 12:20-24). Nevertheless, he also teaches that some gifts are better than others (1 Cor. 12:31). The best gifts are apostle, prophet, and teacher.

In this chapter, three of the speaking gifts will be examined. In the next chapter, the sign gifts will be considered.

## The Gift of Apostle

*Definition of Apostle* In the New Testament, the Greek noun translated “apostle” occurs 81 times and is used several different ways. It means “one sent on an authoritative mission.”

*Identification of the Apostles* Jesus Christ was an apostle (Heb. 3:1). He was officially sent on an authoritative mission by God the Father. Although He was only called an apostle once (Heb. 3:1), there are many references to His being sent (Lk. 4:43; 9:48; 10:16; Acts 3:20, 26; Gal. 4:4; Jn. 17:3, 18; etc.).

Of course, the Twelve were apostles. They were officially sent on an authoritative mission by Jesus Christ. Prior to being sent out, the Twelve were called “disciples.” Once they were sent, they were called “apostles” (Mt. 10:1-2; see also Mk. 6:30 and Lk. 9:10). When Jesus sent them out, He gave them power to work miracles (Mt. 10:1). They did not have the power to work miracles when they were disciples; they only had that power after the Lord officially commissioned them and designated them apostles.

After the departure and denial of Judas and the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter suggested that Judas be replaced. At the time, he said that whoever replaced Judas had to have been with Jesus and be a witness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21-22). Matthias was chosen by lot to replace Judas as an apostle (Acts 1:24-26).

Apostleship was not limited to the Twelve. Paul was an apostle (Rom. 1:1; etc.). He was not with Christ and the other apostles during Christ’s earthly ministry, but He was sent out by Christ (Acts 9:1-19; Gal. 1:1). When he wanted to prove his apostleship, Paul pointed to the fact that he had seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1). As an apostle, he claimed to do the “signs of an apostle,” namely, perform miracles, signs, and wonders (2 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:14-19). Apostles were also able to receive direct revelation from the Lord (Eph. 3:1-5). Paul received the revelation of the church (Eph. 3:1-12) and the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Were there any other apostles besides the Twelve and Paul? Surprising to many, the answer is, “Yes.” There was at least one other apostle. Barnabas is called an apostle (Acts 14:4, 14).

Were there any others besides Barnabas? There are several passages that seem to call others apostles, but these are disputed. For example, Galatians 1:19 says, “But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.” The wording may imply that James was an apostle, and some have insisted that James was an apostle, but others have insisted that the wording does not demand that interpretation and that other considerations indicate he was not. He is never called an apostle elsewhere, even when it would have been appropriate to do so, as in the book of Acts. He does not claim to be an apostle in his epistle. He was the half-brother of Jesus (1 Cor. 9:5) and was head of the Jerusalem church.

Romans 16:7 says, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and any fellow prisoners who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” The phrase “who are of note” may mean that these two were notable apostles, or it may mean that they were recognized as notable by the apostles. If they were notable apostles, why is there no mention of them in the gospels or in Acts?

First Thessalonians 2:6 has been used to teach that Silvanus and Timothy were apostles. It is argued that the “we” includes them because they were listed in the salutation of the letter as authors (1 Thess. 1:1). That is highly unlikely. Many expositors have pointed out that the three men are listed as authors in the salutation, but the letter was obviously written by Paul for he often speaks in the first person. He uses “we” in the editorial sense (see 2:18; 3:1-2; 3:5, where “we” clearly means “I”).

Two others are called “apostles:” Titus (2 Cor. 8:23) and Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), but those are apostles of *churches*, not of Christ. Consequently, the word “apostle” in these passages is translated “messengers” or “representatives” (NKJV; NASB; NIV).

What is striking is that Apollos is never called an apostle, although that would have been natural for Paul to do in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Nor is Timothy ever called an apostle, although he was Paul’s, right-hand man. Instead, he is called a “servant” of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:1), a “minister of God,” and “our fellow worker” (1 Thess. 3:2).

Some men claimed to be apostles, but they were not (2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2).

Thus, in the New Testament, the “gift of the apostle” (Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:28-29) was given to 14 and possibly, although not likely, 15 men: the Twelve, Paul, Barnabas, and possibly James.

*The Cessation of the Gift of Apostle* The gift of apostle has ceased. Paul says, “Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:19-20). Paul is using the imagery of a building to communicate that both Jew and Gentile are together in the same organism, namely the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 2:16). The church is a building, a temple, consisting of people (Eph. 2:21- 22). Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and the apostles and prophets are the foundation of the building.

When a contractor erects a building, he lays the foundation once at the beginning of construction and he does not lay it again. If every century were a different floor in the church building, the saint today lives on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor. As you would not expect the foundation on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor, so you should not expect to see apostles or prophets, which belong to the foundation of the church, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In other words, the gift of apostle was for the beginning of the church in the first century. Today is not in the beginning phase of the building program. Therefore, apostles do not exist today.

There is simply no question but that the gift of apostle has passed off the scene. The requirement for being an apostle is to have seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1) and Paul was the last one to see Him (1 Cor. 15:8). Granted, Matthias was chosen to replace Judas (Acts 1:15 ff.), but that was to complete the Twelve. There is no indication that after that there were successors of the Apostles. When Paul speaks of his approaching death, he did not give instructions for a successor (2 Tim. 4:6-8). When John died, no one replaced him as an apostle. After the death of John, the last of the Apostles to die, there were no more apostles, indicating that the gift of apostle ceased.

Church history verifies this conclusion. In the second century, there were no apostles, no one claiming apostolic authority, nor any apostolic miracles. If there had been apostles in the second century, the surviving writings of Christian leaders from that period would have indicated that, but they don't.

## The Gift of Prophet

*Definition of Prophet* Whereas the gift of apostle is unique to the New Testament, the gift of prophet exists throughout the Old and New Testaments. Prophets wrote many of the books of the Old Testament. Even David is called a prophet (Acts 2:29-30) and, of course, the gift of prophet is listed as a gift in the church of the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:28). What is the gift of prophet?

The Greek word translated "prophet" appears 149 times in the New Testament. The feminine form of this noun occurs twice (Lk. 2:36; Rev 2:20). The verb form is used 28 times. The Greek word comes from a root word that simply means "to speak forth." Therefore, some commentators conclude that the gift of prophecy is nothing more than preaching. Robertson and Plummer state that the gift of prophet is "preaching the word with power" (Robertson and Plummer, p. 266). The popular impression, supported by some scholars, is that what is "spoken forth" is something that is being predicted (Morris, p. 172).

Other expositors point to 1 Corinthians 14:3 as the definition, but 1 Corinthians 14:3 is not defining the gift of prophecy. It is simply arguing that the gift of prophecy is preferable to uninterrupted tongues because prophecy *results in* edification, exhortation, and encouragement. As Godet says: "The conclusion has often been drawn from this verse, that since to prophesy is to edify, exhort, comfort, whoever edifies, exhorts, comforts, merits according to Paul the title prophet. This reasoning is as just as it would be to say: He who runs moves his legs; therefore, whoever moves his legs, runs.... One may edify, comfort, encourage without deserving the title of prophet or prophetess" (Godet, pp. 267-68).

What, then, is the essence of the prophetic gift? Biblically, a prophet is, first and foremost, an individual who receives direct revelation from God (Num. 12:6-8). The revelation is given to him by a vision or a dream. A prophet in the Old Testament was called a "seer," meaning he "saw" a vision.

There is more. The test of a prophet is whether or not what he predicts comes to pass (Deut. 18:15-22). This test is not given to others, such as teachers, only to prophets. Since prediction is the test of a prophet, a prophet must be able to foretell the future. That does not mean that every time he receives a revelation, it is predictive in nature. Such is not the case. A simple reading of the Old Testament "prophetic" books will demonstrate that. It does mean, however, that a prophet must predict at least sometimes and that every time he does, his predictions must come to pass.

If one does not receive direct revelation from God and does not, at least on occasion, accurately predict the future, he is not a prophet!

*Identification of Prophets* There are only a few prophets in the New Testament (Acts 11:27-28; 15:32; 21:8; 21:9-11). The specific illustrations of their prophecies indicate: 1) they received direct revelation from the Lord (see "by the Spirit" in Acts 11:28 and "Thus says the Holy Spirit" in Acts 21:10). 2) They predicted the future (Acts 11:28; 21:10). 3)

Their predictions did not deal with universal truth as much as they gave specific information for specific circumstances. Perhaps the New Testament gift of prophecy is the ability to receive revelation for individuals rather than knowledge for everyone.

*The Cessation of the Gift of Prophet* As Ephesians 2:20 indicates that the gift of apostle has ceased, so it indicates that the gift of prophet has ceased. Both are in the foundation of the church. There is other evidence that the gift of prophet ceased. Second Peter 2:1 says, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you.” Notice carefully that Peter says there were false *prophets* in ancient Israel and there will be false *teachers* among you. Instead of saying that like there were false *prophets* among the ancient Jews, so there are false *prophets* among believers, Peter pens, “even as there will be false *teachers* among you.” This suggests that the prophetic gift had ceased. Second Peter was written in 64 AD.

It should be pointed out that not all who claim to be prophets are prophets. Jesus said, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Mt. 7:21).

In the second century, Montanus and his two female associates claimed to be mouthpieces of the Holy Spirit, who revealed to them that the new Jerusalem would soon descend from heaven and be located in Phrygia (Latourette, p. 28). It is obvious they were not prophets; what they predicted did not come true.

## **The Gift of Teacher**

*Definition of Teacher* The spiritual gift of teaching is the third most important gift in the church (1 Cor. 12:28). The gift of teacher can exist by itself (Rom. 12:7), or it can exist with the gift of pastor (see pastor/teacher in Eph. 4:11).

Unlike the gift of prophet, the gift of teacher does not include the ability to receive special revelation from God. It is the ability to understand and communicate spiritual truth gained from a study of God’s Word. Godet compares the prophet to the traveler who discovered new countries and the teacher to the geographer who organizes and relates the results in a systematic fashion.

*The Continuation of the Gift of Teaching* There is no indication in the New Testament that the gift of teacher has ceased. In fact, in that the two most important gifts (apostle and prophet) have ceased, it would not be too much to say that teaching is the most important gift in the church today.

## **The Gift of Pastor/Teacher**

*Definition of Pastor/Teacher* In the Greek text of Ephesians 4:11, the gift of teacher is inseparably connected to the gift of pastor, indicating that these are two characteristics of the same person. (In Eph. 4:11, both “pastor” and “teacher” are governed by one article; the word “the” occurs before “pastors” but not before “teachers.” This is indicated in the English translation by the fact that the word “some” is not repeated before the word

“teachers,” as it is in the other gifts mentioned in verse 11. Furthermore, the word “and” between “pastors” and “teachers” is different than the other “ands” in this verse.)

The Greek word translated “pastor” means “shepherd.” Shepherds exercise oversight over the flock; they provide for and protect it; they guide it and guard it. A teacher, of course, is one who gives instruction. In this case, the teacher instructs others in the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16). These two functions are united in one man. The pastor/teacher leads by feeding and he feeds by teaching the Word of God.

*The Continuation of the Gift of Teaching* There is no indication in the New Testament that the gift of pastor/teacher has ceased.

## **The Gift of the Word of Wisdom**

*The Definition of the Word of Wisdom* The gift of the word of wisdom is only mentioned once in the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:8). The term “word” refers to speech or discourse. The spiritual gift of a word of wisdom is the special supernatural ability given to a believer by the Holy Spirit to speak wisdom. This gift has been interpreted as: 1) receiving direct communication from God in the area of wisdom, especially concerning the person of Christ, but that is more the concept of prophecy, 2) the ability to understand the depth of the written Word of God, but the Holy Spirit gives that to all mature believers (1 Cor. 2:15-16), and 3) the ability to give wise practical advice based on the Scriptures. This is the ability to see things as they are from God’s point of view and communicate that to others for their profit.

*The Continuation of the Gift of the Word of Wisdom* There is no indication in the New Testament that the gift of the word of wisdom has ceased.

## **The Gift of the Word of Knowledge**

*Definition of the Word of Knowledge* The gift of the word of knowledge is only mentioned once in the New Testament (1 Cor. 12:8). The difficulty with determining the nature of this gift is so little is said about it. Many Pentecostals and Charismatics assume that it is the ability to receive knowledge directly from God. There is no evidence of that in the New Testament. The fact that the nature of the gift of prophecy is the ability to receive messages directly from the Lord makes it highly unlikely that receiving messages directly from the Lord is the essence of the gift of the word of knowledge. Well, then, what is the gift of the word of knowledge?

This gift involves two aspects. The term “word” means speech. This is a speaking gift. The second aspect is knowledge. Thus, the gift of the word of knowledge is the God-given ability to speak knowledge. Apparently, the knowledge spoken is devised from a study of God’s Word (1 Cor. 13:2). This gift involves the ability to comprehend and systematize as well as speak the doctrines, concepts, and ideas of the Scripture. The gifted theologian is an example of someone who has this gift.

The word of wisdom and the word of knowledge are listed side by side in 1 Corinthians 12:8. The word of wisdom is the ability to speak the wise, practical application of the Word. The word of knowledge is more text-centered and the word of wisdom is more life-centered, although both are based on Scripture and are practical.

*The Continuation of the Gift of the Word of Knowledge* Since there is no indication in the New Testament that the gift of the word of knowledge has ceased, it is safe to assume that it still operates today.

## The Gift of Evangelism

*Definition of the Gift of Evangelism* Some believers are gifted at evangelism (Eph. 4:11). The Greek word translated “evangelist” means “one who announces the gospel.” While others (2 Tim. 4:5) and perhaps all believers (Mk. 16:15; Acts 8:1-4) are to do that, evangelists have a *special ability* in communicating the gospel to non-Christians and equip saints (Eph. 4:11-12).

*The Continuation of the Gift of Evangelism* There is no indication in the New Testament that the gift of evangelism has ceased.

## The Gift of Exhortation

*Definition of the Gift of Exhortation* Some believers have the gift of exhortation (Rom. 12:8). The Greek word translated “exhortation” means “to exhort, encourage, comfort.” Exhorters may expound and enlighten, but their main emphasis is exhortation and encouragement. Luther said, “Teaching is directed to the ignorant, exhortation to those who know better.”

*The Continuation of the Gift of Exhortation* There is no indication in the New Testament that the gift of exhortation has ceased.

**Summary:** The gifts which include direct revelation, namely the gifts of apostle and prophet, have ceased, but the other speaking gifts exist today.

Does God speak today? If that means God is *revealing* truth now, the answer is, “No.” The gifts that involve the *reception of truth*, apostle and prophet, have ceased. The New Testament teaches the finality of revelation (Heb. 1:1-2; Jude 3; Rev. 22:18-19).

If the question means that God has revealed His Word and speaks to us by it, the answer is, “Yes.” God communicated His Word to the apostles and a few others. They spoke His word (Acts 2:42) and *recorded* His Word. For believers since the first century, God’s Word is what is *recorded* in the New Testament. Today God *illuminates* His Word by the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:18). God uses believers with the gifts of teaching, pastor/teacher, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, evangelism, and exhortation to instruct people in His Word. As Peter says, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), that is, by the Word of God.

The distinction between revelation, inspiration, and illumination will clarify the issue. Revelation is the act of God whereby He *reveals* truth. Inspiration is the act of God whereby He moves men to *record* truth. Illumination is the act of God whereby He enlightens the minds of people so that they *understand* the truth.

*The truth of God that brings believers to spiritual maturity has been revealed and recorded* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). What is needed today is not more truth; it is an *understanding* of the truth that has been revealed and recorded so believers can become spiritually mature.

## DOES GOD GIVE SIGN GIFTS TODAY?

The pastor and the people of the congregation proudly proclaim, “The nine gifts of the Spirit are operating in our church!” They are referring to the spiritual gifts, namely 1) the word of wisdom, 2) the word of knowledge, 3) faith, 4) healing, 5) miracles, 6) prophecy, 7) discerning of spirits, 8) tongues, and 9) interpretation of tongues. Most of these are sign gifts. The practical results are activities, namely 1) receiving new revelation, 2) speaking in tongues, and 3) healing.

The New Testament indicates that God does not give two of the *speaking* gifts today, namely, the gifts of apostle and prophet (see the previous chapter), but what about the *sign* gifts? Are sign gifts operating today? According to many, the answer is “Yes.”

There are problems with that theology. Many of the greatest saints never performed a miracle, including Noah, Abraham, David, and John the Baptist. For most of the history of the church, most Christians got along very well without the sign gifts. Many of the greatest leaders in the history of the church did not experience, nor did they teach that others should experience, gifts such as prophecy, healing, and tongues. That goes for such outstanding men as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, and Billy Graham.

Furthermore, many godly men question whether or not some of these gifts were intended to extend beyond the first century. That is a claim worth considering. Is it possible that the sign gifts have ceased? Some say, “Yes.” What is the evidence for such a claim?

### The Cessation of the Sign Gifts

*The Cessation of the Gift of Apostle* As was pointed out in the previous chapter, the spiritual gifts of apostle and prophet were part and parcel of the foundation of the church. After the foundation was put in place, those gifts ceased (Eph. 2:20; 2 Pet. 2:1). Virtually all denominations agree that there are no apostles today. (There are a few exceptions. Some teach that the gift of apostle is the gift of church-planting and there are a few self-appointed apostles, but no there are no apostles who have seen the Lord, today.)

The cessation of the gift of apostle proves that at least some of the spiritual gifts have ceased.

One Greek scholar put it like this: “Accordingly, inasmuch as Protestant theology generally has clearly recognized the cessation of the apostolic gifts in the first century, at the same time that it rightly denies any form of apostolic succession, all such Protestant theology becomes basically committed to the principle of temporary gifts. For clearly the apostleship was itself temporary, and, if the principle is established, it is perfectly legitimate to inquire whether there may not be other first-century gifts which were likewise temporary” (Hodges, p. 227).

*The Cessation of the Apostolic Use of Sign Gifts* As was also pointed out in the previous chapter, Jesus gave the *Apostles* the power to work miracles, called signs (Mk. 16:17-20). Paul says “signs and wonders and mighty deeds” were “signs of an *apostle*” (2 Cor. 12:12, italics added; see also Rom. 15:14-19). Several times the book of Acts says

that signs and wonders were done *through the Apostles* (Acts 2:43, see also 5:12). The only other people who performed miracles were Stephen (Acts 6:8), Philip (Acts 8:6, 13), and Barnabas (Acts 14:3; 15:12). Barnabas is called an apostle (Acts 14:14) and both Stephen and Philip were appointed by the apostles (Acts 6:3-6). Such power was not given to others, such as Timothy and Titus.

If all believers were to perform miracles, miracles would not serve as a sign of apostleship. If everyone performed the miracles involved in the signs of an apostle, how would the signs of an apostle be a special authentication of apostleship?

Since the sign gifts were performed by the *Apostles* (or in a few cases by those appointed by the apostles), when the apostles passed off the scene, the sign gifts ceased. If apostles do not exist today, neither do the signs of an apostle! Does it not make sense that God gave the Word through the apostles—confirmed it with sign gifts (Mk 16:17-20)—and then the signs were no longer needed?

Today, the Scripture confirms the message. If people will not hear the Scripture, they will not believe if somebody risen from the dead gave them the message (Lk. 16:31).

*The Cessation of All Sign Gifts* Hebrews 2 indicates that all the sign gifts have ceased. The writer to the Hebrews says, “Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” (Heb. 2:1-4).

This passage is teaching:

1. The Lord spoke the message.
2. Some heard the message from the Lord (the Apostles).
3. Some (“us”) heard the message from those who heard the Lord.
4. God bore witness with signs.

The question is, “Who performed the signs, those who heard the message from the Lord (the Apostles) or us?” The answer is those who heard the Lord. The word “confirmed” is in the past tense (in Greek, the aorist tense). In the Greek text, “bearing witness” is a present tense participle, which describes action contemporaneous with the main verb “was confirmed.” In other words, “both the eyewitness testimony and the miraculous corroboration were past events. The verb tenses do not indicate that these things were still in the process of occurring” (Burdick, p. 38). The King James Version translates Hebrews 2:4, “God also bearing *them* witness.” The word “them” is not in the Greek text, so the King James translators put it in italics, but the Greek construction indicates that they were correct in doing so.

The point of the passage, then, is that God confirmed the messages to us by them—not to us by miraculous signs, but to us *by them who did supernatural things*. Why did those called “us” not perform the miracles? The sign gifts had ceased with those who heard the Lord (the apostles).

Hebrews 2 indicates that all the sign gifts have ceased. It specifically speaks of “signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. 2:4).



## The Cessation of the Gift of Tongues

*Knowledge will be rendered inoperative* Paul declares, “Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away” (1 Cor. 13:8). Paul’s point is that love is superior to prophecies, tongues, and knowledge because love is permanent (it never fails), but prophecies, tongues, and knowledge are part of the passing (they will fail). To understand this verse, several questions need to be answered.

What does Paul mean by prophecies and knowledge? Toussaint, one of my Greek professors in seminary, points out that the Greek word translated “prophecies” can either mean the act of prophesying or it may look at the content of prophecy. In 1 Corinthians 13:8, it is used of the *content of what is prophesied*. Likewise, Paul is not talking about the gift of knowledge (“the word of knowledge”) but *the knowledge that results from the gift*. The proof of this explanation is that Paul explains (see “for” in verse 9), “For we know in part and we prophesy in part” (Toussaint, p. 313). Notice Paul changes the order from prophecies ... knowledge (1 Cor. 13:8) to knowledge and prophecies (1 Cor. 13:9). In other words, in verse 9, he puts knowledge first because he wishes to make a point about knowledge. He is not talking about the *gift of knowledge*, (the word of knowledge); he is talking about *knowledge*, the knowledge gained from the gifts of the word of knowledge and prophecy.

When does knowledge fail? In the Greek text, Paul uses the same word for the failure of prophecy and knowledge. To say the same thing another way, “fail” and “vanish away” are two different translations of the same Greek verb. This Greek verb means “to make idle or inactive, to render inoperative.” At some point, the knowledge gained from the word of knowledge and prophecy will be rendered inoperative. Paul explains when that will happen in verse 10. He says, “When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part (knowledge) will be done away” (Greek: rendered inoperative). There are three interpretations of “that which is perfect:” 1) the close of the canon of Scripture (in the Greek text, “that which is perfect” is neuter), 2) the maturity of the church (“perfect” is used of maturity and the next verse speaks of being a child), 3) the state after the Second Coming of Christ (verse 12 indicates that this is a reference to the state after the coming of Christ).

The next two verses indicate that the correct interpretation is the state after the Second Coming of Christ. Paul says, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Cor. 13:11-12). The illustration of being a child is a reference to the present time (see “now” in verse 12). Then Paul explains (see “for” at the beginning of verse 12) that when that which is perfect has come (see “then” in verse 12), we will see face to face and know as we are known. That did not happen at the completion of the canon or the “maturity” of the church. That will happen after Christ returns. Thus, the point is that after Christ returns, the knowledge gained from the word of knowledge and prophecies will be rendered inoperative.

Toussaint concludes, “What Paul is saying then is this: the *content of knowledge* and prophecy that was known in the early church and has been recorded in God’s inspired Word will be rendered inoperative when Christ comes for His own. The knowledge and

prophecies in the Word are accurate and certain of fulfillment, but they are partial. The full revelation of Christ's presence will so completely overshadow these that they will be rendered inoperative" (Toussaint, p. 314, italics added).

To sum up, in 1 Corinthians 13:8, Paul says the *knowledge* gained from prophecies and the word of knowledge will be rendered inoperative and tongues will cease. Dropping the discussion of tongues, Paul goes on to say that at present, we *know* in part (1 Cor. 13:9, 12), but after Christ comes, the *knowledge* gained from prophecies and the word of knowledge will be rendered inoperative (1 Cor. 13:10). Such knowledge will not be needed because we will see face to face and will know as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12). Paul is not saying that the *gifts* of prophecy and the word of knowledge will be rendered inoperative when Christ comes. He is saying the *knowledge* gained from those gifts will be rendered inoperative. This indicates that the *gifts will cease* before Christ comes.

Notice, 1 Corinthians 13:9-12 is not saying anything about tongues. Tongues were mentioned in verse 8 and are not mentioned again until chapter 14. Therefore, 1 Corinthians 13:10-12 is not teaching that the gift of tongues is operative until Christ comes. Those verses are not even talking about the gift of tongues. So, what happens to tongues?

*Tongues will cease on their own* Toussaint points out that the change in verbs, the change in voice, and the omission of tongues in verse 9 indicate that tongues will cease on their own.

As was pointed out, Paul changes verbs from "fail" (prophecies) to "cease" (tongues) back to "fail" (knowledge). For an author to use one verb, then another, and then go back to the first verb is unusual. As a rule, authors avoid that kind of repetition. In this passage, Paul repeats the word "fail" (Greek: render inoperative) four times (twice in verse 8 and once in verses 10 and 11). Prophecy and knowledge will be rendered inoperative; tongues will simply cease.

In the Greek text, Paul changes the voice of the verbs from passive to middle and back to passive. The significance of these nuances, which are obvious in Greek but not in English, is the passive voice indicates that an outside force will render inoperative prophecy and knowledge, but *the middle voice indicates tongues shall cease on their own*.

Also, as was pointed out, beginning in verse 9, Paul drops the discussion of tongues. The omission of any reference to tongues in verses 9-10 is another indication that tongues cease before the knowledge gained from prophecies and knowledge are rendered inoperative.

Toussaint concludes, "The completeness of prophetic truth and the fullness of knowledge that will be revealed from Him will put our present prophecies and knowledge in their shadow. However, tongues will not endure until the return of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 13 the change of voice and vocabulary in the verbs of verse 8 and the lack of any reference to tongues in verses 9 and 12 imply the gift of tongues ceases before the rapture of the church occurs. Tongues were a temporary gift that God used in the early years of the church. They have long since ceased because their purpose was not a permanent one" (Toussaint, pp. 315-16).

*Tongues did cease* The earliest Christian authors, those who wrote from the time of the New Testament to 150 AD, are called "Apostolic Fathers" because they lived closest

to the Apostles. The surviving works of the Apostolic Fathers include the Epistle to Diognetus (probably written before 100 AD), Didache (probably written before 100 AD), 1 Clement (97 AD), Papias (probably written sometime between 100-110 AD), Polycarp (written about 110 AD), Ignatius (written between 110-115 AD), Quadratus (written between 117-138 AD), Epistle of Barnabas (probably written about 130 AD), The Shepherd of Hermas (probably written about 150 AD), and 2 Clement (probably written about 150 AD). None of these works mention tongues.

Pointing out that tongues is “nowhere alluded to, hinted at, or found in the Apostolic Fathers,” Rogers argues that such silence is deeply significant because 1) “Some of the Apostolic Fathers wrote from and to churches where the gift had been practiced during the time of the apostles” (Clement wrote to Corinth; Ignatius wrote to Ephesus), 2) the Apostolic Fathers wrote from “practically every significant area of the Roman Empire,” 3) the Apostolic Fathers wrote about “practically every major doctrine taught in the New Testament,” and 4) the Apostolic Fathers wrote about subjects that gave them “an excellent opportunity to present the gift of tongues as a proof for the supernatural character of Christianity,” but they did not mention tongues—not once (Rogers, pp. 134-136).

Note one striking example: In 97 AD, Clement of Rome wrote to Corinth (1 Clement). He mentions Paul by name and talks about the church having some of the same problems they had when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, but he does not mention tongues!

What about the authors who wrote after the Apostolic Fathers (after 150 AD)? Justin Martyr (ca. 100-165) traveled extensively, but “in spite of this extensive traveling and teaching, Justin has nothing to say regarding the gift of tongues” (Rogers, p. 136). Rogers asks, “If the gift were prominent, why did a man of his stature fail to give any notice to it?” (Rogers, p. 137).

Justin Martyr does not mention tongues, but Irenaeus does. He says, “We hear many brethren in the Church... who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages.” He is probably referring to “those who were influenced by Montanus” (Rogers, p. xx). Neither he nor those around him (see “we”) spoke in tongues; they only heard about it.

What about Montanus? Eusebius says, “So that he (Montanus) was carried away in spirit, and was wrought up into a certain kind of frenzy and irregular ecstasy, raving, and speaking, and uttering strange things and proclaiming what was contrary to the institutions that had prevailed in the church.” In his later life, Tertullian (160-220) joined the Montanists. He even wrote a reply to the critics of Montanism (see his work called *Ecstasy*). He argued that being overshadowed by God’s power “causes a person to lose control of mind and common sense” (Westin, p. 14). The only time he specifically mentions tongues is when he discusses 1 Corinthians 12-14, but all he does is talk about what Paul says. He does not say tongues were practiced in his day, or that he had seen or heard of anyone in his day who exercised the gift.

Montanus and his followers were considered extremists. What they did fell “far short of the gifts as exercised by the apostles” (Rogers, p. 141); it was not the common or the normal practice of the day. The Montanists were excommunicated by the first synods of bishops known in the history of the church (Wright, p. 74). In 381, the Council of Constantinople declared that the Montanists should be looked upon as pagans (Cairns, p. 102). Why they were condemned is uncertain. “They were fanatics but not heretics” (Wright, p. 74). In 407, the Roman emperor Honorius decreed the death

penalty for all Montanists, which caused them to be more closely united with other heretical movements (Westin, p. 15).

Origen (185-254) quotes Celsus as saying: “To these promises are added strange, fanatical, and quite unintelligible words, of which no rational person can find the meaning: for so dark are they, as to have no meaning at all; but they give occasion to every fool or impostor to apply them to suit his own purposes.” In his answer, Origen says “that though the Holy Spirit gave signs and outward demonstrations of His presence at the beginning of Christ’s ministry and after His ascension, these things have diminished and are no longer widespread. Furthermore, he says Celsus is speaking falsely when describing what he had heard: ‘For no prophet bearing any resemblance to the ancient prophets have appeared in the time of Celsus.’ What Origen is saying is that no longer are there any of these gifts in operation!” (Rogers, p. 142). Dollar says, “It is not clear whether these prophets were within the orbit of Christian activity or prophets of other religious groups” (Dollar, p. 317).

Chrysostom (345-407 AD), who understood that tongues were languages, testified that tongues did not exist in his day. He says tongues “used to occur but no longer take place.”

Augustine (354-430 AD), from a different geographical location than Chrysostom, concurred. He says tongues “were signs adapted to the time” and they “passed away.”

Rogers concludes, “If the gift of tongues did not cease completely in the first century, then there should be evidence of this continuation. If the gift is as important as many teach, then the leaders of the Post Apostolic Age should have stressed this and commended its practice highly. The evidence, however, does not indicate that tongues had a significant place in the church from A.D. 100 to 400” (Rogers, p. 134).

## **The Cessation of the Gift of Healing**

There are a number of passages in the New Testament that indicate that the gift of healing ceased before the New Testament canon was closed.

In 60 AD, Paul healed people on the island of Malta (Ac 28:7-10), but a few years later (62 AD), he wrote that Epaphroditus “was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him and not only on him but also on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil. 2:27). Paul was not able to heal Epaphroditus when he first got sick. A year later (63 AD), Paul told Timothy, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23). If Paul still had the power to heal, why did he not heal Timothy? Years before, Paul had sent out handkerchiefs and aprons from his body to the sick by which they were healed. (Acts 19:11-12). Why did Paul not send a handkerchief with his letter? At the end of his life (67 AD), Paul left Trophimus at Miletus sick (2 Tim. 4:20). Why did Paul not heal him before he left him?

There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that the sign gifts would continue. The apostles claimed to have supernatural spiritual gifts. They warned against counterfeit gifts but never gave them to others. On the other hand, there are indications that the sign gifts would cease when the apostles passed off the scene. With the completion of the New Testament canon, supernatural signs were no longer needed to authenticate the message. If a person will not believe God’s Word, miracles will not do it either (Lk. 16:31).

**Summary:** The sign gifts have ceased.

The gifts of apostle and prophet, as well as the sign gifts of miracles, healing, tongues and, of course, interpretation of tongues, have passed off the scene. A few observations are in order.

1. The evidence is stronger for the cessation of some of these gifts than others. I would personally be the most dogmatic about the cessation of apostle and prophet. There is no more revelation today. I would also insist that the gifts of miracles and healings have ceased. There are no miracle workers around today (I believe in divine healing, but I have a problem with “divine” healers). I would be less dogmatic about tongues. While I believe the case is strong for the cessation of all sign gifts, including tongues, I would admit that if a case met all the biblical qualification, it could be of God. First and foremost, it must be a known language! For a detailed discussion of tongues, see the chapter on “Speaking in Tongues” in the Pentecostal course in this series.

2. The focus should be on Scripture, not signs; on maturity, not miracles. When Jesus was here, He said He would give no sign but the sign of Jonah which was the miracles of His resurrection (Mt. 12:39). He also said if they would not believe Moses, they would not believe the miracle of one coming back from the dead (Lk. 16:31).

Should we go to church to see a sign or hear the Scripture? Should we be seeking miracles or spiritual maturity?



# DOES GOD USE MIRACLES TO EVANGELIZE TODAY?

Have you heard? There is a new approach to evangelism. It began with one man in one church in Southern California and spread across the United States. In August of 1986, *Christianity Today* reported that well over 100 churches using this approach had “sprung up across the country” (Stafford, *Christianity Today*, p. 17). That same year a book appeared claiming that this approach had grown into a movement of 40,000 people in 140 congregations around the U.S. and Canada (Wimber, p xxi).

It is called “Power Evangelism.” Speaking of this new movement, *Christianity Today* said: “The excitement is largely that generated by all Pentecostal ecstatic worship, healings, exorcisms, speaking in tongues, prophecies, and ‘words of knowledge,’ Yet the Signs and Wonders movement is distinctive, with its own theology, its own terminology, its own music, its own style. It is breaking into churches that have never felt the full force of the charismatic movement” (Stafford, p. 17).

Power Evangelism is Pentecostalism in new clothes. Indeed, it is being called the “third wave,” the first wave being the inception of the Pentecostal movement at the turn of the century and the second began the outburst of the charismatic movement in 1960.

What is “Power Evangelism?” Is it biblical? Should we practice Power Evangelism today?

## Power Evangelism

*The Roots* The roots of Power Evangelism lie in the soil of the mission field and to some extent a theological perspective. Many missionaries have observed that pagan people are enslaved by satanic power and have concluded that what is needed is a “power encounter.” Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel is the classic example when the power of God encountered the power (or, rather, lack of power) of Baal. The true God prevailed.

The founder of Power Evangelism “relies heavily” (Stafford, p. 18) on George Ladd’s theology of the Kingdom of God. For many years, Ladd was a Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He emphasized the Kingdom of God as an invasion force not only proclaiming the gospel but also demonstrating its superior power over Satan through miracles such as healings and exorcisms.

*The Fruit* These roots produced the fruit of Power Evangelism. The tree between the root and the fruit was a man named John Wimber. As a young Christian, Wimber spoke in tongues but later taught that the charismatic gifts are “not for our time” (Stafford, p. 18). After pastoring a fast-growing Friends church, Wimber became a consultant on church growth for the Fuller Evangelistic Association. For three years, he flew all over America consulting with hundreds of churches—none of them Pentecostal or charismatic. The experience disillusioned him. He concluded, “There was a lot of action that was called the work of the Holy Spirit, but it was nothing more than human effort in which

the Holy Spirit was asked to tag along. I felt that it turned the stomach of God. It certainly did mine, and it wore me out” (Stafford, p. 19).

Meanwhile, his wife became a charismatic. She started a prayer group that grew to 50. In 1977, Wimber resigned his position as a church growth consultant and became pastor of that group. He began to preach through Luke’s gospel and concluded that he ought to be doing what Jesus did; he ought to be seeing people healed. He then began to give altar calls for healings, but none took place. That continued for ten months and finally, one young lady was healed in her home of a fever. From that point, the church began to grow.

Wimber began to travel, not just in this country, but overseas, especially to England. He and Peter Wagner launched a course at Fuller Seminary called MC510, popularly known as the “Signs and Wonders” class. The course offered an optional laboratory in divine healing in which students were prayed for that they might be healed.

I once talked with a fellow who claimed his leg was lengthened in that class. MC510 became the most popular course on campus. Eventually, Wimber wrote a book called *Power Evangelism*.

Power Evangelism is the use of miracles, signs and wonders, to evangelize. Healing is not the issue. Wimber wants more than that. He wants supernatural power to be seen in the church (Stafford, p. 20). The healings, the exorcisms, the miraculous must be demonstrated in the service so God’s power can be seen. That means public miracles like exorcisms, healings, tongues, and the word of knowledge.

Wimber’s view of the word of knowledge is that God gives direct revelation to him concerning a particular individual. For instance, he tells of seeing the word ‘adultery’ printed in the face of a man he met on an airplane and that God gave him the name of the woman involved. The man was so shaken he was converted on the spot.

## **A Biblical Evaluation**

Is Power Evangelism biblical? To answer that question for myself I read the book by that title, as well as several articles on that subject. I also talked to individuals in and outside the movement. I have concluded that Power Evangelism misinterprets critical biblical concepts. I have five areas of concern.

*The Gospel* After reading Wimber’s book, I am persuaded that he does not present the gospel of the grace of God. For example, he says, “A ‘cheap grace’ gospel is frequently preached, producing weak Christians who do not stand when powerful and persuasive attacks come from the world. I believe this is a serious problem; many Christians do not understand or know how to communicate the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Wimber, p. 37).

As Charles Stanley has said, “cheap grace” is worse than that; it’s free. Power Evangelism does not clearly present the free gift of God’s forgiveness. Listen to Wimber: “Proclamation of a faulty gospel will produce faulty or, at best, weak Christians. Such is the case all too often today. Instead of a call to the lordship of Christ and membership in his kingdom, people are hearing a gospel that emphasizes self: come to Jesus and get this or that need met, be personally fulfilled, reach your potential. This, however, is not the costly kingdom gospel that Christ proclaims: ‘Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it’ (Mark 8:35).



“Often the kingdom is likened to a Caribbean cruise on a luxury liner. People change into their leisure clothes, grab their suntan lotion, and saunter down to the docks. What a shock it is when they find that entering the kingdom is really more like enlisting in the navy and doing battle with the enemy” (Wimber, p. 8).

Wimber is not presenting the clear gospel of the free grace of God. He is teaching the costly gospel of the Kingdom of God. One seminary professor wrote in a letter:

“I am deeply concerned that the clarity of the gospel is compromised in some of the power encounters. I see this constantly in Wimber’s material. People always seem to be receiving Jesus as their savior without any explanation of the facts of the Gospel. They appear to believe in a God who heals illness. Our deepest need is forgiveness from sin and reconciliation to God. This happens only by grace through faith in the promise of God and the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Instead of believing in a God who forgives sin at such great cost, it seems to me that people believe that God delivers from illness and suffering, something which is never promised in this life.”

*Spiritual life* I would say that the ultimate in the spiritual life is the development of Christ-like character in the believer, but Wimber says: “Through this ten-month period I became aware of another dimension of Christian growth, an exercise of faith for miracles such as healing, words of knowledge, and so on. (Perhaps this is the “faith” described in I Cor. 12:9.) Key to this was learning how to know when God’s unction or anointing had come for a task like healing in a particular situation.

“Emphasis on doctrinal knowledge and character development is good; this other dimension of Christian growth adds much more. This was a difficult lesson for me to learn, which explains why nothing happened for many months” (Wimber, pp. 43, 44).

In other words, character development is good, but it is not the ultimate—miracles are! Wimber believes that believers need more than Christ-like character!

*The Great Commission* According to Wimber, in programmatic evangelism, Christians witness to everyone they meet in obedience to the general command of Scripture to “go and make disciples.” In Power Evangelism, the same command is obeyed, only differently. Each evangelism experience is initiated by the Holy Spirit for a specific place, time, person, or group. Instead of indiscriminately spreading the message and depending on a preprogrammed message, those practicing Power Evangelism depend on the immediate illumination of the Holy Spirit to give pertinent information for each encounter.

In programmatic evangelism, the Christian says, “In obedience, I go. Holy Spirit bless me.” In Power Evangelism, the Christian says, “As the Holy Spirit tells me to go, I go” (Wimber, p. 46). “In programmatic evangelism, the attitude is that we do something and then God works. In power evangelism, God speaks and then we act” (Wimber, p. 47).

In Power Evangelism, one is not to witness until the Holy Spirit has moved him or her to do so. That is a perversion of the Great Commission.

*Spiritual Gifts* A major issue in Power Evangelism is the use of sign gifts, the miraculous gifts, to win people to Christ. Here again, Wimber misrepresents the Scripture. For example, concerning B. B. Warfield’s position that sign gifts ceased at the end of the Apostolic age around the end of the first century, Wimber says: “No Scripture passage either states or implies his position” (Wimber, p. 119).

The only verse he considers relevant to this is 1 Corinthians 13:10. To answer that, he erects a straw man, blows him over, and concludes there is no Scripture passage that

either states or implies that sign gifts have ceased. That is a gross misrepresentation of that interpretation of Scripture.

*The Miraculous* Wimber also misrepresents the biblical concept of the miraculous. There is no question that God used miracles to confirm the message of the gospel. That was true of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:22) and of the Apostles (Mk. 16:17-20). Furthermore, God intended for these confirming signs to produce faith. (Jn. 20:31). Just because God did that once, does not mean God intended to do that all the time every day.

Power Evangelism has simply misinterpreted the Scripture. For example, what they call the word of knowledge is not, and what they practice is more like prophecy, which has ceased. They claim to receive direct revelation from God concerning a particular individual. This is tagged as the gift of the word of knowledge, but that is not the word of knowledge. The word of knowledge is the ability given by the Holy Spirit to speak knowledge gained from a study of the Scripture. The biblical name for the kind of thing they are claiming is prophecy, which has ceased (Eph. 2:20).

Take another example, namely tongues. Tongues is not the sign of the gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit which, according to them, is received after conversion. All believers receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit upon conversion (1 Cor. 12:13). Not every believer has the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:28).

The ultimate issue is healing. Healing was a sign gift (Mk. 16:17-18), which has ceased (Heb. 2:3-4). Nevertheless, Power Evangelism argues that the Apostles did signs and wonders in the book of Acts and therefore signs and wonders must occur today.

Tom Edgar, a seminary professor, did a detailed study of the miraculous in the book of Acts and concluded: "It is significant that the word for wonders (*teras*) occurs nine times in the book of Acts, but it does not occur after 5:12, and in that passage, it refers to the previous ministry. The word for signs (*semeion*) occurs thirteen times, does not occur after 15:12 (where it refers to the previous ministry), and does not describe an actual occurrence after 14:3. The word for miracles (*dunamis*) occurs ten times and does not occur after 19:11. The six occurrences of *teras* (wonders) in Acts, where it describes actual ministry (the performance of wonders), all occur in the first half of the book. The seven occurrences of *semeion* (signs), which describe actual ministry, also occur in the first half of the book of Acts. Four of the five examples of *dunamis* (miracles), which describe actual ministry, occur in the first eight chapters of Acts. These three words occur a total of thirty-two times in Acts, but only six of these times are after chapter 8. Apparently, the main part of the miraculous ministry occurred during the early days of the Church—that is, in the first third of Acts. A study of the miracles themselves supports this implication. The frequency of miracle-working seems to have been on the decline during the lifetime of the apostles" (Edgar, p. 99).

Signs and wonders have not only ceased, they ceased during the lifetime of the Apostles, even before the end of the Book of Acts!

Is Power Evangelism biblical? Yes, in a way. Power evangelism is biblical like dividing rivers is biblical. It did occur in the Bible. Is it to be normative for today? No!

Other issues could be raised. For example, there is an unstated but real assumption in this approach that the only place where the power of God is present is where God is working miracles. The problem is not that this movement makes too much of God's power but too little.

“In fact, after the church was born at Pentecost, no miracle ever occurred in the entire New Testament record except in the presence of an apostle or one directly commissioned by an apostle. Examples of those who were commissioned would be Stephen and Philip (see Acts 6). One never reads in the New Testament about any specific miracle occurring at random among the Christian believers. Even the miraculous granting of the Holy Spirit in Samaria, to Cornelius the Gentile at Caesarea, and to the followers of John the Baptist at Ephesus did not occur, until the apostles were there (see Acts 8:10, 19)” (McArthur, p. 80).

## An Explanation

*Success is not the test* Well, then how do you explain the success of the Vineyard churches, where Power Evangelism is being practiced? First of all, the issue is not success but Scripture. The Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the Unification Church have also been successful in attracting great numbers, but they are not Scriptural.

*Miracles are doubtful* These churches claim they are seeing miracles. Are they? The problem with proving that is no thorough study has been done. One of the few articles appeared in *Christianity Today* in August 1986. The author, Tim Stafford, wrote: “One might get the impression, hearing Wimber publicly, that miraculous healing is as common as snow in Minnesota. But, in fact, Wimber says, because the Vineyard’s reputation draws sick people from all over, it might be sicker than an ordinary church. How many healings has he seen of the spectacular type in which a young Britisher’s withered hand began to grow slowly back to its normal size? ‘Very, very few,’ he says” (Stafford, p. 20).

By Wimber’s own admission, there are very, very few biblical-type healing miracles. Healing headaches is not a biblical-type healing. I wonder if an objective investigation of the “very, very few” would yield any *bona fide* biblical-type miracles.

There is more. To Wimber and his followers, the revelation they call “the word of knowledge” is just as significant as healing. *Christianity Today* reported, “Roberta Hestenes, a professor at Fuller, says she has heard Wimber claim virtual infallibility, but she knows of particular cases where his ‘word of the Lord’ has been wrong” (Stafford, p. 21). “Mel Roebeck, an Assemblies of God pastor who is the assistant dean of Fuller’s School of Theology, cites a comment made by Kenneth Hagin, a well-known charismatic leader: ‘Hagin says that in every city he travels to, a number of people will be waiting for him with a word of the Lord. But in all those years, Hagin says only a few of those words have come true. That’s a devastating comment on the word of the Lord’” (Stafford, p. 21).

The truth is, what they are claiming is biblically called prophecy, and, according to the Scripture, if a prophet gives one false prophecy, he is not a prophet!

*More Hollywood than Heaven* What is going on at the Vineyard sounds like more hype and Hollywood than hard reality. Wimber is simply living and practicing ministry on a subjective level and claiming supernatural power. Again *Christianity Today* explains: “Hearing Wimber, you may conclude that these messages are utterly outside normal human experience. But Wimber is talking about something close to the ‘inner impressions’ that have long prompted people to say, ‘The Lord is leading me ....’ Wimber

writes. ‘There is something very simple, almost childlike, about power evangelism. God gives impressions, and we act on them’” (Stafford, p. 21).

The supposed healings attract people. There is no question about that, but that’s more Hollywood than heaven at work. One observer said: “One Fuller professor suggests that the power of Wimber’s church is the excitement fueled by healing, not the renewal of hope for God’s coming kingdom.... It identifies Christ’s kingdom as that which overcomes sickness, overcomes evil. Where there is no overcoming of sickness, there is no kingdom. People are not coming to the Vineyard to be renewed in their hope for the future; they are coming for healing in the present.”

The same professor speaks of “lottery Christianity” in which “there must be a few big winners—spectacular healings—and many \$10 winners—cured headaches—to attract a crowd. This is far from a theology of the cross.”

**Summary:** Power Evangelism is nothing more than a new name for the old but doubtful claims of Pentecostalism.

Power Evangelism claims revelations, tongues, and healings for evangelism, but it is biblically and practically questionable that they are practicing revelations, tongues, or healing in the biblical sense of those terms.

The ultimate issue is this: Is Power Evangelism normative? The answer is, “No!” Believers should communicate the gospel as it is: the power of God to salvation. You do not need the miraculous. There are times it will not work (Lk. 16:31). If God chooses to use it, fine, but do not parade it as the normative. It is not.

“Regent College theologian J. I. Packer asks, ‘In saying that “power evangelism” is normative, do they realize they are saying that the evangelism of John Wesley, D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham is sub-biblical?’” (Stafford, p. 22).

“I would honor God,” Packer continues, “by articulating the victory in another way. Christ enables us to be more than conquerors under pressure. We seek the strength to cope with divinely permitted circumstances. There are many of us for whom the role model is Joni Eareckson rather than John Wimber. We see the powers of the kingdom operating, but mainly in regeneration, sanctification, the Spirit as a comforter, the transformation of the inner life, rather than in physical miracles which just by happening prevent much of that other kingdom activity whereby people learn to live with their difficulties and glorify God.”

The *Christianity Today* author concluded his article by saying: “John Wimber challenges us not to box God in. His critics would bring the same challenge to him.”

## CONCLUSION

Does God speak today? Does God work today? Does He heal? How does He win people to Christ?

God speaks today—through His Word! The inspired Old Testament ends with an announcement that there is more to come (Mal. 4:5-6). The inspired New Testament concludes that God has finally spoken through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). He has “once for all” delivered the faith (that which is to be believed) to the saints (Jude 3). Nothing is to be added or taken away from God’s final revelation (Rev. 22:18-19). Everything believers need to know to be “thoroughly equipped” is contained in the inspired Word of God. What is needed today is illumination of what God has written, not more inspiration. The issue is not, “Does God speak today?” The issue is, “How does God speak today?”

God works today—every day! God’s power and grace are available to those who trust Him (Eph. 3:16-17), but trials (Jas. 1:2) are part of God’s plan. God’s power is not just in miracles. It is experienced in the enablement of the believer to be patient *with joy* (Col. 1:11). God’s grace is the ability to *endure* suffering (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

God heals today—miraculously (Jas. 4:15-16)! That does not mean that God gives the gift of healing today. The healing movement, which claims that the gift of healing is operating today, is based on a misinterpretation of the Scripture. For example, they claim that if a person is not healed, it is because that individual did not have enough faith. But when the Apostles could not heal, Jesus said that it was because *they* (the Apostles) did not have enough faith (Mt. 17:19-21)! For a detailed examination of the theology of the modern healing movement, see G. Michael Cocoris, *The Healing Heresy*. It is available free of charge at [www.insightsfromtheword.com](http://www.insightsfromtheword.com) and [www.disciplesbibleinstitute.com](http://www.disciplesbibleinstitute.com).

God brings people to Christ today—multiple times per day—without a demonstration of His miraculous power. Concerning the need for a miracle for someone to be converted, Jesus said, “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (Lk. 16:31).

God can do anything He wants to do. He is God. Before we claim God is doing something, however, we should ask, “What does God say in His Word that He is doing today?” Let’s believe what God has said without putting words in His mouth.



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