THE MIRACULOUS TODAY

G. Michael Cocoris

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION **1**

SHOULD YOU "EXPECT A MIRACLE"? **3**

DOES GOD SPEAK TODAY? **9**

DOES GOD GIVE SIGN GIFTS TODAY? **17**

DOES GOD USE MIRACLES TO EVANGELIZE TODAY? **21**

CONCLUSION **27**

APPENDIX: SIGNS AND WONDERS **29**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **31**

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 first.

God supernaturally speaks to people today. He communicates directly with each individual, 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 heals people with 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 evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Others teach that speaking 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 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" were not miracles after all. More importantly, a careful exposition of the Scripture indicates that what is being taught 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 T.V. evangelist exhorts the viewers to "expect a miracle." Testimonials are told 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, everyday ordinary 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, and books and booklets proclaiming, "Expect a miracle." Christians flock to churches that offer music, messages, 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? 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," it 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, 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 are 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 miraculous and 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" (*ISBE*, Vol. 3, pp. 2063-64).

This concept has ramifications: 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 blowing a trumpet.

In all cases, whether a natural law was used or a human agent was used, the basic idea is that a miracle is the extraordinary manifestation of a 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, survey the various periods of 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, this period should be excluded from evaluating miracles in the daily lives of people. Granted, there were miracles during this time, but these miracles were in a class by themselves. A human agent did not perform them; 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. No one would claim that God duplicates the Enoch episode all the time!

Is it not interesting that there were only four miracles from creation to Abraham in a period of 1,000s of years?

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. Genesis, however, extends

beyond Abraham through the life of Joseph, who died in 1806 BC. From Genesis 12 to Genesis 50, from Abraham's call to Joseph's death, is around 300 years. How many miracles occurred during the patriarchal period?

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 on a daily basis. Nevertheless, counting everything, even possibly miraculous, during the period of the patriarchs, there were eight miracles in 300 years.

Actually, all eight happened during Abraham's lifetime, though not all eight happened to Abraham. (*cf.* 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 Scripture. There were eight miracles in the space of 100 years and then nothing 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 then extended for about 53 years.

Clearly, 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 10 commandments written on stone by God, a judgment of death, a donkey speaking and the death of Moses, which are 20 of the 33. "Aside from Jesus, it has never been given to any man to be the agent of so many and such stupendous manifestations of Divine Power" (Halley, p. 141).

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

During the period of Exodus and the conquest of about 53 years, there were 40 miracles, which does not average out to one 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, the miraculous ceased again. It might be argued that there were a few miracles during this period, such as Gideon's fire rack, Gideon's fleece, or Samson's destruction of the Philistines, but certainly, 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 that 112-year period, 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 in about 858 BC. Thus, from the death of Joshua about 1390 BC to the beginning of the next period of miracles, there were 532 years with virtually nothing miraculous.

The second season of the supernatural was during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Dating this duet 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 the 60-plus years, these two men worked wonders.

How many miracles are attributed to these two depends on what is counted. Dr. Scroggie gives Elijah and Elisha eleven. 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 10 during the ministry of Elijah and 13 during the ministry of Elisha. Therefore, in about 60 years, there were about 22 to 24 miracles, averaging no more than one every two years.

After Elijah and Elisha, there were 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 ministry of the Apostles, miracles were again performed. Christ began His ministry about AD 27, and the Apostles worked miracles until AD 60. So, for 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, Christ worked many miracles. Obviously, 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 then 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 miracles by the Apostles and 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 Ananias and Sapphira's death and Peter and Paul's miraculous prison releases.

In about 30 years, from about AD 27 to about AD 60, Christ 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. That is why they are called "signs." They pointed to something else, the message.

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

The subject of miracles must be kept in a biblical perspective. Rationalists explain them away. That is not accurate. Some believers try to expand them. That is not appropriate either. The biblical balance recognizes that they occur but do not occur daily.

In the approximate 2100 years from Abraham to the apostles, there were only three periods of miracles: Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Christ and the apostles. Each period lasted less than one hundred years. Furthermore, during the periods of miracles, on 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. Dr. Charles Smith said, "God never intended for signs and wonders to be characteristic of the daily life of believers in any age."

Should you expect a miracle? If you mean that believers should 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. 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 that daily. Obviously, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but that is a statement about His *person*, not His *program*. Clearly, 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 to produce 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 (rain)
Miracles in believer's 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).

God's glorious power strengthens believers, but what are they strengthened by God's glorious power to do? This is not the power to work extraordinary miracles. 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 ox head floated on water. Candidly, I do not expect that kind of miracle today, but I do expect God to work. If I were 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 chose 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 apparent that this young man knew Jesus Christ and was deeply committed to Him. When I spoke to him, he worked at a "secular" job. During the course of our conversation, I asked about his plans, expecting him to tell me he was going to continue with the occupation he was in at that time. To my surprise, he told me he was planning to enter the ministry. What was even more 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?

In order to answer these questions, the spiritual gifts in general and three spiritual gifts in particular (apostle, prophet and the word of knowledge) must be examined.

The Spiritual Gifts

The Number of Spiritual Gifts Three passages list spiritual gifts, Romans, 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 12:28-30 and Ephesians 4:11. These three passages contain eighteen different spiritual gifts. Prophecy and teaching are the only gifts to appear in all three places. Apostleship, administration and helps are mentioned in two of the three.

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	

Types of Gifts The New Testament divides spiritual gifts into three categories. In one passage, Peter cites two of the three categories. He 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 included publicly ministering the Word, such as the gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, teacher, wisdom, and the Word of knowledge. Serving gifts include gifts such as administration, giving, mercy, and helps.

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). Mark adds, "So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen" (Mk. 16:19-20). In other words, Jesus speaks of "signs," including the gifts of miracles, tongues, and healing. These sign gifts were to confirm the Word (Mk. 16:20).

Among the speaking gifts, apostles and prophets received messages directly from the Lord. Some say so do those who have the gift of a Word of knowledge. These are the gift that must be examined to determine if God speaks directly today.

The Gift of Apostle

Jesus The Greek noun "apostle" occurs 81 times in the New Testament. It means "one sent on an authoritative mission." It has been used so often of the twelve apostles that most today automatically think of the twelve when they hear the word. That is not, however, the only way the word is used in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ was an apostle (Heb. 3:1). He was officially sent on an authoritative mission by God the Father. Though He was called an apostle once (Heb. 3:1), there are many references to His being sent (cf. Lk. 4:43, 9:48, 10:16, Ac 3:20, 26, Gal. 4:4, Jn. 17:3, 18, etc.). In Hebrews 3:1, He is called an apostle and a high priest. As Bruce points out, "When Jesus is designated as "the Apostle and High Priest of our confession," He is marked out as being both God's representative among men and men's representative in the presence of God" (Bruce, p. 55).

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

After Judas's departure and denial and Christ's death and resurrection, Peter suggested that Judas be replaced. At the time, he said that whoever replaced Judas had to

have been with Christ 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).

These men were the representatives of Jesus Christ. They were with Him, saw Him after the resurrection, were sent out by Him and were given the ability to do miracles.

Paul Apostleship was not limited to the twelve for 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, he 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" (2 Cor 12:12, Rom. 15:14-19), which is an significant statement. If all believers were to perform miracles, then miracles would not serve as a sign of apostleship.

Evidently, apostles were able to receive direct revelation from the Lord (Eph. 3:1-5). Paul received the revelation of the church (Eph. 3) and the rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

Barnabus 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 clearly called an apostle (Acts 14:4, 14).

Were there any others? 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 some 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 Christ (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 actually 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 as authors in the salutation of the letter (cf. 1 Thess. 1:1), which is highly unlikely. Many expositors have pointed out that the three men are listed as authors in the salutation, but Paul obviously wrote the letter, for he often speaks in the first person. He uses "we" in the editorial sense (2:18; 3:1-2, 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). In fact, it is striking that Apollos is never called an apostle, though it would have been natural for Paul to do so in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Timothy is not called an apostle, though 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 claimed to be apostles and were not (2 Cor 11:13 and Rev 2:2).

Thus, the "gift of the apostle" (Eph 4:11, 1 Cor 12:28, 29) includes 14 and possibly, though not likely, 15 men: the twelve, Paul and Barnabas, and possibly James.

The Gift of Prophet

What it is not 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 involved in this gift? What is the gift of prophet?

The Greek word translated "prophet" appears 149 times on the pages of the New Testament. The feminine form of this noun occurs twice (Lu 2:36, Rev 2:20). The verb is used 28 times. The Greek word comes from a root, which simply means "to speak forth." Some here see in the prophet nothing more than preaching. Robertson and Plummer state that the gift of prophet is "preaching the word with power" (1 Cor. p. 266). The popular impression, supported by some scholars, is that what is "spoken forth" is something that is being predicted (Morris on 1 Cor. p. 172). Others have pointed to 1 Cor 14:3 as the definition, but 1 Corinthians 14:3 does not define the gift of prophecy. It simply argues 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, p. 267-268).

What it is 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 dream. In fact, 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 it is predictive every time he receives a revelation. Such is not the case. A simple reading of the Old Testament "prophetic" book will demonstrate that. It does mean, however, that a prophet must predict at least sometimes and that his predictions must come to pass every time he does.

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

There are only a few prophets in the New Testament (cf. Acts 11:27-28, 15:32, 21:8, 21:9-11). The specific illustration of their prophecies indicates that 1) they received direct revelation from the Lord. (*cf.* "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 specific information for specific circumstances. Perhaps the New Testament gift of prophecy is the ability to receive revelation for individuals rather than wisdom and knowledge for everyone.

The Gift of the Word of Knowledge

What it is not One other gift needs to be considered, namely, the gift of the word of knowledge (1 Cor 12:8). What is the gift? The difficulty with determining the nature of this gift is so little is said about it in the New Testament. 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?

What it is This gift involves two aspects. The term "word" means speech. This is a speaking gift. The second aspect is knowledge. The gift of the Word of knowledge is the God-given ability to speak knowledge. Apparently, the knowledge spoken is derived from a study of God's Word (1 Cor. 13:2). This gift involves comprehending, systematizing, and speaking the doctrines, concepts, and ideas of Scripture. The gifted theologian is an example of 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, though both are based on Scripture and are practical.

The Gifts of Apostle and Prophet have Ceased

Apostle The two most important spiritual gifts in the church are apostle and prophet. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul 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 gift in the universal church, but 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 is teacher. After that, there are gifts, but the others are not ranked.

Paul has argued that 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, there is simply no doubt that he also teaches that some gifts are better than others (cf. 1 Cor. 12:31). The best gifts are apostle, prophet and teacher.

The gifts of apostle and prophet, the two highest-ranking gifts, have ceased. Ephesians 2:19 and 20 says, "Now therefore you are not 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."

In this passage, Paul is speaking about the church, the body of Christ. He is using the imagery of a building to communicate that both Jew and Gentile are together in the same organism (cf. esp. Eph. 2:16). The church is a building, a temple, consisting of people (cf. 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 there were a different floor in the church building for every century, the saint today lives on the 21st floor. As you would not expect the foundation on the 21st floor, you should not expect to see apostles or prophets, which belong to the church's foundation, in the 21st century. In other words, the gifts of apostle and prophet were for the beginning of the church, that is, in the first century. Believers today do not live at the beginning. Therefore, apostles and prophets 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). Paul was the last one to see Him (1 Cor 15:8).

Church history verifies this conclusion. Apostles, for sure, and, no doubt, prophets passed off the scene. "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 gift. For clearly, the apostleship was itself temporary, and, if the principle be established, it is perfectly legitimate to inquire whether there may not be other first-century gifts that were likewise temporary. (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 120, #479, p. 227),

Alva McClain says, "By the second century, the apostles were gone and things were changed. When the church appeared in the second century, the situation regarding the miraculous changed so much that we seem to be in another world."

Green wrote, "When we emerge in the second century, we are, to a great extent in a changed world. Apostolic authority lives no longer in the Christian community; apostolic miracles have passed. (Samuel Green, *Handbook of Church History*, quoted by McArthur, p 83).

If the greatest gifts have ceased, have others ceased as well?

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 in the New Testament that the gift of the 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" (2:1a). There were false *prophets* in ancient Israel and Peter says that 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" (2:1). This suggests that the prophetic gift had ceased.

Word of Knowledge That does not mean that all gifts have ceased. For example, there is no indication in the New Testament that the Word of knowledge would cease. It is safe, therefore, to assume that the gift of the Word of knowledge still operates today.

Summary: The gifts, which include direct revelation, namely the gifts of apostle and prophet have ceased. The gift of the Word of knowledge has not. It exists today.

Does God speak today? If the question means that God is *revealing* truth now, either universal or local truth, the answer is "No." 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."

Let me put it like this: God called apostles, commissioned apostles, and communicated His Word to them and through them, as well as a few others. The early church continued in the Apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). For believers past the first century, the Apostles' doctrine is the New Testament. Today, God illuminates His Word by the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:18).

The distinction between revelation, inspiration, and illumination will clarify the issue. Revelation is an act of God whereby He *reveals* truth. Inspiration is an 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 you need is 1) the Word of God, 2) the Spirit of God, and 3) the illumination of God (Ps. 119:18). That is all you need to be spiritually mature (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

The gift of apostle ceased (Eph. 2:20). Therefore, some gifts are temporary.

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 nine spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 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 an unknown tongue, and 3) healings.

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

There are problems with that theology. For most of the history of the church, most Christians got along very well without the sign gifts. In fact, many of the greatest leaders in the history of the church did not experience, nor did they teach that others should experience, gifts like prophecy, healings, 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 some of these gifts were intended to extend beyond the first century. That is a claim worth consideration. Is it possible that the sign gifts have ceased? Some say, "Yes." What is the evidence for such a claim?

All Sign Gifts

All Sign Gifts Hebrews 2 indicates that 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 teaches: 1) The Lord first spoke the message. 2) The message was confirmed to us (second generation, that is, both writer and readers) by those who heard the Lord (first generation). 3) God bore witness with signs. The question is, "Who performed the signs, the first or second generation?"

The answer is those who heard the Lord (the first generation). The Greek text indicates that those who bear witness with sign gifts heard the Lord. 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 is that God confirmed the messages to us by them—not by us by miraculous signs, but by them who did supernatural things. Why did the second generation (us) not perform the miracles? The implication is that these sign gifts had ceased with the second generation.

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 Sign of an Apostle Paul speaks of the signs of an apostle. He says, "Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12; see also Rom 15:16-19).

Notice that the signs of an apostle were "signs and wonders." In Acts, except for two deacons, Steven and Philip, all miracles were by apostles. Does it make sense that God gave the Word through the apostles—confirmed it with sign gifts (Mk 16:17, 20, Heb. 2:1-4)—and then the signs were no longer needed?

If apostles do not exist today, then neither do the signs of an apostle! By the way, if everyone performed the miracles involved in the sign of an apostle, how would the sign of an apostle be a special authentication of apostleship?

The Gift of Tongues

First Corinthians 13 not only teaches that all the gifts will cease, but it indicates that tongues will cease on their own!

All Gifts will Cease In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul demonstrates that the fruit of the Spirit, love, is superior to the gifts of the Spirit. He argues that love is superior to gifts because it endures beyond gifts (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

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). Love is eternal (1 Cor. 13:13), but gifts represented here by prophecy, tongues, and knowledge are not part of the permanent; they are part of the passing. Prophecy is the greatest gift (1 Cor. 12:28). Tongues are the least on the list, indicating it is the last (1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 29). The greatest and the least will all cease. The question is, "When?"

There are three answers as to when these gifts will cease. All three interpretations hinge on the meaning of "that which is perfect" (1 Cor. 13:10). The three views are 1) the close of the canon, 2) the maturity of the church, and 3) the second coming of Christ.

The support for the "completed Scripture" view is that the phrase "that which is perfect" is in the neuter. Therefore, it does not refer to Christ because He would have to be masculine. Furthermore, Christ is never referred to in the New Testament as "that which is perfect" (Greek, complete). If "that which is perfect" refers to the completion of the canon of Scripture, then tongues ceased when the canon was closed.

First Corinthians 13:12 seems to indicate that the coming of Christ is "that which is perfect." It says, "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 13:12). Even if that is the correct explanation, it does not mean that Paul is saying that the *gift of tongues* will not cease until Christ comes. The passage says that when He comes, Christ will stop knowledge and prophecy, but there are indications that tongues will cease on their own.

Tongues will Cease on their Own Notice, 1 Corinthians 13:8 says, prophecies will *fail*; tongues will *cease* and knowledge will *vanish away*. "Fail" and "vanish away" are two different translations of the same Greek word. In both cases, it is in the passive voice (that means an outside force will come in and stop it).

For tongues, however, Paul uses a different word (shall cease) and changes it to the middle voice (which means something like, "It will cease on its own). For Paul to change from prophecies will *fail* (passive voice) to tongues *cease* (middle voice) is significant. For him to change back to knowledge will *fail*, and changing back to the passive voice is even more significant. What does all this mean?

The significance of these nuances, which are apparent in Greek but not in English, is that an outside force will stop prophecy and knowledge, but tongues shall cease on their own. In the next verse, Paul discusses knowledge and prophecy but omits tongues. Tongues will cease on their own, but all gifts will have ceased by the eternal state.

Toussaint, a Greek professor, argues that the change of the verb and voice concerning tongues in verse 8 implies tongues will cease before prophecy and knowledge are abolished. Furthermore, tongues are omitted in verses 9-12, indicating that they will not be in existence to be rendered inoperative when Christ returns (Stanley D. Toussaint, "First Corinthians Thirteen and the Tongues Question." *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 120. October-December 1963, pp. 311-316).

Besides this Scriptural evidence, there is the testimony of the early church. Except for a few cases in which the tongues were not genuine, tongues ceased after the first century. Chrysostom (AD 345-407), 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 (AD 354-430), from a different geographical location, concurred: He says tongues "were signs adapted to the time" and they "passed away."

The Gift of Healing

Several passages in the New Testament indicate that the gift of healing ceased before the New Testament canon was closed.

In AD 60, Paul healed people on the island of Malta (Ac 28:7-10), but a few years later (AD 62), he wrote that Epaphraoitus "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). Apparently, Paul did was not able to heal Epaphraoitus when he first got sick. A year later (AD 63), 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 Tim? 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 not Paul send a handkerchief with his letter? At the end of his life (AD 67), Paul left Trophimus at Miletus sick (2 Tim. 4:20). Why did Paul not heal him before he left him?

Nothing in the New Testament indicates that the sign gifts would continue. The apostles claimed to have supernatural spiritual gifts. They warned against counterfeit 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 does not believe God's Word, miracles will not do it (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 ceasing some of these gifts than others. I would be the most dogmatic about the cessation of apostle and prophet. There is no more revelation today. I would also insist that miracles and healings have ceased. There are no miracle workers around today (I believe in divine healing; 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 qualifications, it could be of God. First and foremost, it must be a known language!

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 miracle of His resurrection (Mt. 12:39). He also said if they did 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 Scripture? Should we be seeking miracles or 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 U.S. 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 claimed 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, terminology, music, and 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 of when the power of God encountered the power (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's kingdom 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 wore me out" (Stafford, p. 19).

Meanwhile, his wife became charismatic. She started a prayer group that grew to 50. In 1977, Wimber resigned 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 and seeing people healed. He then began to give altar calls for healing, but none took place. That continued for 10 months, and finally, one young lady was healed of a fever in her home. 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 divined healing in which students prayed 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 using 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, and 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 on the face of a man he met on an airplane, and then 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 actually 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, and 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! They add 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 to do so. That is a perversion of the Great Commission.

Spiritual Gifts The 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 that no Scripture passage 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 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 misinterpreted Scripture.

For example, what they call the Word of knowledge is not and what they do 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 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 are not the sign of the gift of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which, according to them, is received after conversion. Everyone has the baptism (1 Cor. 12:13). Not everyone has the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:28).

The ultimate issue is healing. Healing, as well as tongues, was a sign gift (Mk. 16:17-18), which has ceased (Heb. 2:3, 4). Nevertheless, power evangelism points out that the apostles did signs and wonders in 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 previous ministry. The word for signs (semeion) occurs thirteen times, does not occur after 15:12 (where it refers to 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 dunamus (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, but they ceased during the apostles' lifetime and during the Acts!

Is power evangelism biblical? Yes. Power evangelism is biblical, like dividing rivers is biblical. It occurred 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 Christian believers. Even the miraculous granting of the Holy Spirit in Samaria, to Cornelius the Gentile at Caesarea, and 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 Vineyard, where power evangelism is being practiced? First of all, the issue is not success but scripture. The Mormons, the JW's, and the Moonies have been successful in attracting great numbers, but they are not Scriptural.

Miracles are doubtful They claim they are seeing miracles. Are they? The problem with proving that no thorough study has been done is that 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 them, the revelation they call "the word of knowledge" is just as significant as healing. *Christianity Today* reported, "Roberta Hesienes, 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. 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 has been established as its criteria. It identifies Christ's kingdom as that which overcomes sickness and 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—in order to attract a crowd. This is far from a theology of the Cross,' he says" (source unknown).

Summary: Power evangelism is nothing more than a new name for Pentecostalism's old but doubtful claims.

Power evangelism claims revelations, tongues, and healings for evangelism, but it is Biblically and practically questionable that they are practicing revelations, tongues, or healing as in Bible terms.

The ultimate issue is this: Is power evangelism normative? The answer is no! Communicate the gospel as 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 Earekson 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 *Christian 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

In his class on Acts, Hodges taught, "As it was inconceivable in NT days that the Scriptures should require miraculous confirmation, so it is inconceivable that they should require it today. A message proclaimed from an inspired NT has no need of such authentication. For this reason, the appearance of miracle workers on the Biblical scene is always connected with periods of prophecy and/or new revelation. While it is true that the Bible is full of miracles, it is not true that it is full of miracle-workers. We can identify only three periods of Biblical history in which miracle workers appear, viz.: the period of' Moses and Joshua; the period of Elijah and Elisha; the period of Christ and the Apostles. All are periods o£ prophecy, and span at the most two generations." He also pointed out that many of the greatest saints never performed a miracle, including Noah, Abraham, David, and John the Baptist.

The question is, 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 was 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 will be added or removed 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 power and grace are available to those who trust Him (Eph. 3:16-17), but trials (Jas. 1:2) and suffering (Job) are part of God's plan. God's power is not just in miracles. It is experienced in the enablement 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 a misinterpretation of 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 did not have enough faith (Mt. 17:19-12). For a detailed examination of the healing theology, see *The Healing Heresy* by G. Michael Cocoris.

God brings people to Christ today—multiple times daily without demonstrating 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. However, before we claim God is doing something, 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.

APPENDIX: SIGNS AND WONDERS

The expression “signs and wonders” is used of the judgments on Egypt more than anything else in the Bible (Ex. 7:3, Deut. 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 26:8, 29:3, 34:11, Neh. 9:10, Ps. 135:9, Jer. 32:20-21, Acts 7:36). This was the first “shock and awe.”

In the Old Testament, other than calling the Exodus miracles “signs and wonders,” that expression is only used by Isaiah to say that he and his children are signs and wonders to Israel (Isa. 8:18) and by Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:1-3) and Darius (Dan. 6:27) to describe what they saw God do apart from a human agent.

Jesus did sign and wonders. In John, Jesus worked miracles, which are called “signs.” In Acts, Peter says that Jesus was “attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs” (Acts 2:22).

The Apostles did sign and wonders. Jesus spoke of “signs” (Mk. 16:17) that would confirm the Word (Mk. 16:20). The signs that are listed are exorcism, speaking in tongues, healing, handling snakes, and drinking poison.

The book of Acts says that the apostles performed “signs and wonders” (Acts 2:43, 5:12). In Acts 4:30, the prayer for God’s servants to heal and do signs and wonders was a prayer for Peter and John to do them, as is evident from the fact that the prayer was a result of a healing miracle done by them (Acts 3:1-9). Twice the book of Acts says that Paul and Barnabas did signs and wonders (Acts 14:3, 15:12). Both were apostles (Rom 1:1, Acts 14:14).

Paul says he did “mighty signs and wonders” (Rom. 15:19) and “the signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12). The fact that sign miracles were “signs of an apostle” indicates that they were “special” miracles. If everyone did sign miracles, they would not be the “sign of an apostle.”

In the New Testament, the only exception to either Jesus or an apostle *doing* “signs and wonders” was Stephen (Acts 6:8), on whom the apostles laid hands (Acts 6:5-6).

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). Actually, both references are to the Lord’s statement that “For 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).

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