

NO SIGN WILL BE GIVEN



The Context of
the Miraculous Signs
in the First Century

written by
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No Sign Will Be Given

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Dedication:

I formally dedicate this work to Rev. Flem Friendly, who said, "Be healed or have it fall off – according to your faith!"

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The Context of the Miraculous Signs in the First Century

Frank Daniels

There are groups of Christians – even among Full Preterists – who classify themselves as “Pentecostal” or “Charismatic.” Following the neo-Pentecostal movement of the early Twentieth Century, they believe that the miraculous signs (or “spiritual gifts”) that were available in the First Century are supposed to be available to all Christians and through all time periods. They often cite pseudo-Mark 16 (“These signs will follow those who trust”) to support their viewpoint. On the other side of the debate are the Anti-Pentecostals. These Christians are convinced that the miraculous signs were supposed to terminate with the compilation of the New Testament. For example, “The best interpretation of this verse is to see that “the perfect” refers to the New Testament, the mystery of Christ unfolded. This process ended between 70-100 CE, depending on one’s view of Revelation.”¹ This article puts forth a third point of view: a sort of middle ground. Let’s examine the relevant passages together.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But to those of us who are being saved, it is God's power. For it was written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise people and the reason of the reasoners I will put away.”²

Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe? Where is the truth-seeker of this age? Didn't God make foolish the wisdom of creation? For when (in God's wisdom) the creation did not know God through its wisdom, God was well pleased to save those who trust by means of the foolishness of this heralding.

And while **Jews are asking for signs** and Greeks are seeking wisdom, now we are heralding an Anointed One who was crucified, a cause of falling indeed to Jews but foolishness to Gentiles. But to those who were called, both Jews and Greeks, the Anointed One is God's power and God's wisdom, because God's foolishness is wiser than people are, and God's weakness is stronger than people are. (1 Cor 1)

In his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul’s initial point begins with an appeal against the Greek conceptualization of wisdom. For the leader of one’s philosophical movement to willingly permit himself to be publicly executed is far from wise in that sense. However, the reference to the Jewish people asking for signs appears here as a contrast that the author does not immediately make. There were indeed “signs” for the Jewish people, but most of them were unwilling to recognize them for what they were. If there were such signs, then Jesus had been the Messiah. If he was the Messiah, then his teachings were the accurate application of the Torah. This was the thing that they couldn’t believe, and so the signs merely caused them to trip and fall. When Paul does address the issue of the miraculous signs (chapters 12 through 14 of the letter), the central section of his address concerns trading in their foolish distraction by miracles for a focus on Love.

Even in that first chapter, Paul has already provided the remote context for the authorship of the letter.

I always give thanks to my God about you, for that generosity of God which was given to you in Anointed Jesus, because in all things you were enriched in him –in all speech and all knowledge –just as the testimony of the Anointed One was established in you so that

¹ A Study of Denominations, website

² Isa 29:14

you are not lacking any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revelation of our Lord, Anointed Jesus. He will also establish you finally as blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus.

The testimony of the Anointed One indicates Jesus' internalization of the Torah. The reference to the readers "not lacking any spiritual gift" is the direct result of their bearing the "testimony of the Anointed One." This is to say that for the most part they had shown themselves of being capable of demonstrating clear evidence of the relationship qualities that Paul elsewhere refers to as the spirit's fruit.

But the spirit's fruit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, truthfulness, trust, meekness, self-control. The Torah is not against these. But those who belong to the Anointed One have crucified the flesh, along with the passions and strong desires. (Gal 5)

Even though the "spiritual gifts" in Paul's introduction do not refer to the miraculous signs, the temporal framework for the letter is important to comprehending the letter as a whole. The Corinthians were waiting for "the revelation of our Lord," so that they will have been found to be blameless on "the day of our Lord Jesus." The day for which they were waiting was the day of the destruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, when both they and Jesus were to be vindicated for their trust in him. Paul makes occasional references to that upcoming judgment in the letter.

When he asks rhetorically, "Don't you know that you are God's temple" (ch. 3), he has removed the concept of worship as set of ritual activities that take place in that Temple which had been marked for destruction. If his readers were concerned about who were "God's assistants" (ch. 4), he urges them to withhold judgment "until the Lord comes. He will both enlighten the things hidden in the darkness and will make the plans of hearts appear." If some of them were now going astray to fleshly things, he urged them to *purge the evil* from among them in order that their "spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord" (ch. 5). Paul expects this judgment on Priestly Judaism to come very soon, and that expectation of imminence is what ties together all of the elements of the letter.

When Paul addressed the matter of some of their men sleeping with prostitutes because their wives had withheld sex from them, this was likely due to their desire not to have children that would grow up in violent turmoil. He urges them not to change any social standing in their lives: "In the condition he was called in, brothers, each person should remain in this with God" (ch. 7). This included not getting married, "since the season is short" and "the scheme of this creation is going by." He writes of the love that they show one another in their dinners together as "announcing the Lord's death until he should come" (ch. 11). Chapter fifteen directly addresses more of their apprehensions about that impending event. This context looms over the letter and, as we shall see, over the administration of the miraculous signs as well.

During his life, Jesus also dealt with the issue of people asking for signs.

Then some of the scribes and Perushim asked him, saying, "Teacher, we want to see signs from you." But he answered, saying to them, "An evil and adulterous generation hunts for a sign, and no sign will be given to it except for the sign of Yonah the prophet." (Mt 12:38f.)

Although Jesus did continue to perform signs and wonders, the ultimate sign would be his own resurrection from the dead. As Jesus had known, most of that evil generation – the ones who had demanded signs – would reject the signs that God had given them.

Such is the ultimate instruction from the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In that instance also the majority of the people were going to reject the ultimate sign: Jesus' resurrection.

"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the prophets. They should hear them.'

"But [the rich man] said, 'No, father Abraham. But if someone should go to them from the dead, they will change their minds.' But he said to him, 'If they will not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from among the dead.'" (Luke 16)

Thus, the signs were useful indicators, but they were never necessary. The person who was "asking for signs" did so because he refused to accept the teachings of Jesus. To the Israelite who already trusted God, the sign was a pointer showing the way: not necessary but useful in the day when there were several schools of thought within (Priestly) Judaism. Let's examine the social and literary context in which those signs appear in the New Testament.

Signs and Wonders

Then he came again into Kana of Galilaiah, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain courtier whose son was sick in Kafar-Nahum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilaiah, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, who was about to die. Therefore Jesus said to him, "If you all don't notice signs and wonders, you won't trust." The courtier said to him, "Oh sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus said to him, "Go. Your son is alive." (Jn 4)

The expression "signs and wonders" appears in John 4 at the earliest time in Jesus' life – and several other times in the New Testament. This expression hearkens back to the Israelites' departure from Egypt and indicates the purpose for the miracles that Jesus and his followers would perform in the presence of the unbelieving people.

In Hebrew, the words are *ôwth* and *môwphêth*, indicating something that appears (a sign) and proof of God's involvement (a beautiful or wondrous thing). If a *môwphêth* concerns a future event the word is the rough equivalent of the English word "omen." In the Septuagint and in the New Testament the words appear in Greek as *σημειον* (a mark or sign) and *τερας* (an omen or wonder). The verb associated with the interpretation of omens was *τεραζω*.

In the Bible as a whole the two words first appear together in Exodus 4, where the words are given as being synonyms for the same set of miracles:

"Take that rod with you, and use it to do the signs."

...

Yahweh told Moses, "When you get back to Egypt, see that you show Pharaoh all the wonders that I have given you the power to do, but I will make him stubborn so that he will not let the people go." (Ex 4:17, 21)

After that first time, the expression "signs and wonders" was used in the Hebrew Bible in several instances to refer to the miracles and plagues that God worked through Moses in Egypt: **Ex 7:3; Dt 4:34; Dt 6:22; Dt 7:19; Dt 13:1f.; Dt 26:8; Dt 29:3; Dt 34:11; Neh 9:10; Ps 78:43; Ps 105:27; Ps 135:9; Jer 32:20-1**. These are numerous enough that they demonstrate a consistent pattern of usage. Briefly:

“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and I will multiply my **signs and wonders** in the land of **Egypt**.” (Ex 7:3)

“Or has a god tried to go take a nation as his own out of another nation, by trials, **signs, wonders**, and war, by a strong hand and an outstretched arm, by great terrors, as **Yahweh your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?**” (Dt 4:34)

“Before our eyes Yahweh gave great and harmful **signs and wonders** on **Egypt**, on Pharaoh, and on all his household.” (Dt 6:22)

You performed **signs and wonders** against **Pharaoh**, all his officials, and all the people of **his land**... (Neh 9:10)

He sent **signs and wonders** against you, **Egypt**, against Pharaoh and all his officials. (Psa 135:9)

The use in Deuteronomy 29 connects the “signs and wonders” to the establishment of the Mosaic covenant. Any other “signs and wonders” were to be interpreted within that relationship.

“You have seen all that Yahweh did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, **those great signs and wonders**. But to this day Yahweh has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear. ...”

You stand assembled today, all of you, before Yahweh your god...to enter into the covenant of Yahweh your god, sworn by an oath, which Yahweh your god is making with you today; so that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your god, as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob...

Along with the blessings to the faithful, God sent curses on all those who rejected his instruction. When people saw the divine judgment against those who had left God they would know that the judgment was “because they abandoned the covenant of Yahweh, the god of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. They turned and served other gods... so Yahweh’s anger was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in this scroll.”

It was possible that a so-called prophet could demonstrate what appeared to be a sign or a miracle, but they might not be in agreement with the covenant that God was establishing to Moses. In particular, they might lead others to serve false gods (Dt 13). In that case, God allowed the miracle to occur in order to provide a test for the people (v. 3). They were to follow Yahweh alone, and they were to *execute the miracle worker* for trying to lead the people astray.

Other passages that reference “signs and wonders” do so in a manner that employs the typology established in Exodus. For example, Isaiah refers to the children of the nations of Israel and Judah as “signs and wonders” (8:8) that the Torah would survive the Assyrian invasion. In the next generation, Hezekiah would enact reforms and rescue his people from oppression – reminiscent of Moses.

Having observed that the signs and wonders were proofs of God’s activity during the time when he was establishing the Mosaic covenant, we see further that Jeremiah invokes Deuteronomy 29 and the signs and wonders in Exodus 4 when he points ahead to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem under the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and to the Exile that followed:

“Oh, Yahweh God! ... You showed **signs and wonders** in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all humanity, and have made yourself a name that continues to this very day. You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with **signs and**

wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, ... but they did not listen to your voice or walk in what you set down; they did none of all you directed them to do. Therefore you have made all these disasters come upon them”...

And it happened that Yahweh’s message came to Jeremiah, saying: ... “I am going to give this city into the hands of the Chaldeans and into the hand of King Nabu-kadurri-usur of Babylon, and he will take it. The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city will come, set it on fire, and burn it ... For the people of Israel and the people of Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me to anger by the work of their hands,” says Yahweh. (Jer 32)

There were plenty of miracles in the Old Testament, but the use of the expression, “signs and wonders,” was limited in its scope; they confirmed Moses’ giving of the Torah, and they accompanied judgment against the covenanted people who rejected God’s instruction. When Jesus brought up the signs and wonders, it was within a context similar to what we see in the Hebrew Bible. The Anointed One was the successor to Moses, heralding both a new covenant and an impending destruction of the faithless. John refers to the conversion of water to wine as the “**first of the signs**,” for it was the first time that Jesus had demonstrated that he was the Anointed One (he “displayed his glory”) – the person charged with bringing a new covenant. That those signs indicated that he was a true prophet is something that we also encounter at the beginning of John 3: “**Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, because no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him.**”

The only other occurrence of “signs and wonders” in the gospels (apart from John 4) is in connection with the false Anointed Ones and false envoys. Those Jewish people, also claiming to be Moses’ successors, were going to *pretend* to perform signs and wonders. The performing of those so-called signs and wonders likewise would falsely seem to bring the new covenant. We read again about those people in 2 Thessalonians (see below).

After Jesus sent out his students, the miracles that *they* performed were referred to using the same language, signs and wonders, for their setting was the same. The use of the expression after Jesus begins in Acts 2, which refers to a prophecy of Joel. We will pick that prophecy up later. In that same context, though, we see that the identical usage of the two words continued:

Jesus the Nazarene was a man who was pointed out to you as being from God through powerful deeds, and **wonders**, and **signs**, which God did through him in your midst, just as you yourselves know. (Acts 2:22)

And fear happened to every soul, and many **wonders and signs** were done through the envoys. (Acts 2:43)

And now, oh Lord, look on their threats and grant to your slaves to speak your message with all freedom of speech, to stretch out your hand for healing, and to do **signs and wonders** through the name of your holy servant-boy Jesus. (Acts 4:29-30)

Now through the hands of the envoys many **signs and wonders** were done among the people. (Acts 5:12)

Now Stefanos, full of favor and power, worked **wonders and great signs** among the people. (Acts 6:8)

[Moses] led them out, doing **wonders and signs** in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and for forty years in the desert. (Acts 7:36)

Then for a considerable time they remained, speaking freely about the Lord; they testified to the message of God's generosity by giving out **signs and wonders** which happened through their hands. (Acts 14:3)

Now all the crowd was silent, and they heard Bar-Nabas and Paulus telling about what **signs and wonders** God did through them among the gentiles. (Acts 15:12)

For I won't dare to speak of those things that the Anointed One did not work out through me for the listening of the nations, with word and deed, with the power of his **signs and wonders**, with the power of **God's breath**. (Rom 15:18-9)

Indeed, the **signs of an envoy** were worked out among you with all endurance: **signs and wonders and powers**. (2 Cor 12:12)

For the secret of lawlessness is already working (until only the one who is holding back in the present should happen out of our midst). And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the breath of his mouth and deactivate with the appearance of his presence. The lawless one's presence is according to the working of the enemy: with all kinds of false power and **signs and wonders** and with all kinds of unjust deception for those who are being destroyed. (2 Thess 2:7-10)

This was first received through the Lord to be spoken by those who heard, and it was confirmed for us, with the co-testifying of God both by **signs and wonders**, and by various **powers**, and by distributions of **holy breath**, according to what he wants. (Heb 2:4)

In the Hebrew Bible, the signs and wonders had arisen in two contexts: confirming the covenant as the Israelite people left Egypt for the Promised Land, and in association with divine judgment against the faithless Israelites. In the New Testament, we observe again that the "signs and wonders" were connected with Moses (Ac 7:36), with Jesus as Moses' successor (Ac 2:22), with the upcoming judgment on Priestly Judaism (2 Thess 2), and with proving that the new covenant was from God (the other citations). The use of "breath" or "holy breath" to refer to the miraculous signs is something that we observe here and will mention again soon.

The Baptism of John

Our discussion of the scope of the miraculous spiritual gifts in the New Testament must begin in what will seem to some of you to be an unusual place. We must start with John the Baptizer. He establishes the broadest context for the arrival of the signs – a context that also appears in Acts 2. Specifically, we read:

Therefore he said to the crowds who were coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who has pointed out to you to flee from the **coming anger**? Therefore, make fruit worthy of the mental change and do not begin to say among yourselves, 'We have Abraham as a father.' For I am telling you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham out of these stones!

"But already the axe is at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not make nice fruit is chopped down and is cast into fire." ...

Now all of the people were expecting and reasoning in their hearts about John – whether he was the Anointed One. John answered to everyone, saying, "I indeed am baptizing you with water, but someone stronger than I is coming, of whom I am not enough to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with holy breath and fire.

"His winnowing fork is in his hand to fully cleanse his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary. But he will **burn up the chaff** with unquenchable fire." Therefore indeed, advising them also of many other things, he announced a good message to the people. (Lk 3)

Matthew's version explains that it was the presence of the religious leaders that prompted John to characterize not all the people but the religious leaders as a brood of vipers:

Then Jerusalem went out to him, and all Judea, and all the country surrounding the Jordan, and they were baptized in the Jordan River by him, fully acknowledging their errors. But when he noticed many of the Perushim and Zadokites coming to his baptism, he said to them.... (Mt 3)

In John's own words, the role of the Anointed One with respect to the Israelite people was interwoven with an **upcoming judgment**. We now know from history that the burning of the chaff described above was the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. This was what John referred to as "**the coming anger**." The axe was at the **root** of the trees; that is, the religion – representing those who were not genuine truth-seekers – was going to be removed. Observe closely that John began and concluded his remarks the same way: with a direct reference to the end of Priestly Judaism. Everything in the passage is in that context of the coming judgment, and that judgment was the very reason that John spoke these things. This context is crucial, because everything that happened afterward relating to the miraculous gifts is framed in the same context.

The Sending of the Twelve

After *naming* the twelve people whom Jesus was about to charge with spreading his message, the authors point out the scope of their charge:

Jesus sent out **these twelve**, charging them, saying, "You should not go out into a road of gentiles, and you should not enter into a city of Samaritans. But go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Now after you go, herald, saying that, 'The kingdom of the heavens has neared.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out spirit beings. You have received freely; give freely." ... (Mt 10)

This commission to the Twelve was not merely limited to Jesus' lifetime. It was intended to direct them not only to the time while Jesus was with them but to the coming years ... up to the point when a specific event was to occur:

"But watch out for the people. They will deliver **you** over to Sanhedrins, and they will whip **you** in their gatherings. And **you** will be led to governors (but also kings) on account of me, as **witnesses** to them and to the nations. But when they deliver **you** up, do not be anxious about how or what **you** should speak, for what **you** should speak will be given to **you** in that hour. For it is not **you** that will speak, but the spirit of your Father that speaks within **you**."

"Then brother will deliver up brother for death, and father will deliver up child. And children will rise up at their parents, and they will cause them to die. And **you** will stand as hated by all people on account of my name, but the one who endures to the end, this one will be saved."

"Now when they persecute **you** in this city, flee into the other. For indeed I am telling **you**: **you** should by no means complete **the cities of Israel** until the **Son of Man comes**."
(Matthew 10, continued)

As it would turn out, the primary mission of the Twelve as ambassadors to Jews everywhere would be completed shortly after Jesus' death, but the mission for them covered the period between that day (c. AD 28) and a day that was going to occur within their lifetime: the so-called "Second Coming" at the end of the age. This was the day when the Temple was destroyed in AD 70. For those who object to my use of the label, "second coming," please read my comments on pages 4 through 6 of [Days of Future Passed](#).

The Eleven's Final Talks With Jesus

Among the resurrection appearances, Jesus met with ten of his students – Thomas was absent – and symbolically gave them miraculous powers that would remain after he ascended.

Then again [Jesus] said to them, "Peace to you. As the Father sent me, also I am sending you." And having said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive holy breath. Whoever's sins you may let go, they are let go. Whoever's sins you hold, they have been held." (Jn 20)

These statements were reminders of the sending of the Twelve, as we see in **Matthew 10** (above). This is to say that Jesus reminded the envoys of the mission of the Twelve, and he symbolically breathed on them. The Hebrew concepts of "breath" and "spirit" are the same, and indeed the miraculous gifts are commonly referred to in the New Testament as "holy breath" (πνευμα ἅγιον). As Jesus prepared to depart, he continued to remind them of these same teachings in order to prepare them for their life without his physical presence.

Now he said to them, "These are my sayings that I spoke to you while I was still with you: that it is necessary for all the things that are written in Moses' Torah and in the Prophets and in the Psalms about me to be fulfilled."

Then he opened their minds to understand the writings, and he said to them, "Thus it was written for the Anointed One to suffer and to be resurrected from among the dead during the third day, and for mental change to the point of forgiveness of sins to be heralded in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And look, I am sending my Father's **promise** upon you, but you are to remain connected with the city until you are empowered with power from on high." (Lk 24)

Matthew summarized the same discussion this way:

Now **the Eleven** students went into Galilaiah to the mountain where Jesus had put them in order. And when they noticed him, they bowed down to him, but they hesitated. And Jesus went to **them**, speaking to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make students of all the nations, baptizing them into [my] name, teaching them to keep all of whatever precepts I gave **you**. And look, I am with **you** all the days, until the **conclusion of the age**." (Mt 28)

Luke adds further details about the same conversation in his second treatise ("Acts"):

And he gathered them together and charged them "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's **promise**, which you heard from me, because 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized in holy breath' after not many of these days."

So, after they came together, they indeed asked him, saying, "Lord, will you restore the kingdom to Israel at that time?"

Now, he said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own authority. However, you will receive power when the holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and as far as the farthest part of the land." (Ac 1)

Now that we have looked at the passages together, we see that Jesus explained to the Eleven that he was completely fulfilling the role of the Jewish Messiah. One expectation of the Messiah concerned the "restoration of the kingdom" to Israel. The Jewish people always understood this to signify a period of self-determination: a time when the Jewish people would govern their own land. When they asked him specifically about the restoration of the kingdom (Acts 1), he replied by telling the Eleven that they would serve as his witnesses to (Jewish) people from every nation under the sky. This time of testimony was going to be connected with what John the Baptizer had said.

The destruction of the Temple was the conclusion of the age. At that time (in Jesus' metaphor), God's messengers would remove the unbelievers – by removing the religion by which they thought to have access to God.

"Now the harvest is the conclusion of the age, but the harvesters are messengers. Therefore, as the dandel plants are collected and burnt up with fire, in the same way it will be **at the conclusion of the age**. The Son of Man will send out his messengers, and they will collect from his kingdom all the stumbling blocks and those who are doing lawlessness. And "they will throw them into the furnace of fire." There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth." (Matthew 13)

"It will be this way at the **conclusion of the age**. The messengers will exit and will separate out the evil ones from the midst of the just ones, and "they will cast them into the furnace of fire." There, there will be crying and grinding of teeth. Did you understand all of these things?"

They said to him, "Yes." Now he said to them, "For this reason every scribe who learns the kingdom of the heavens is like a person, a ruler of the house, who casts new and old things from his treasury." (Matthew 13, continued)

But now, once and for all, he has appeared at the **conclusion of the ages** for a removal of error through his sacrifice. (Hebrews 9)

Now these things happened to these people as types; now it was written for **our** admonition, to whom the **conclusion of the ages** has come upon. (1 Corinthians 9)

Thus, the renewal in Mt 28 of the commission in Mt 10 has exactly the same context: the Twelve were promised miraculous guidance all their lives, until the conclusion of the age. Their goal was to take the message of the spiritual Torah to Jewish people from all nations.

Pentecost and the Joel Prophecy

Jesus repeated the baptizer's own words about himself: "I indeed am baptizing you with water, but ... [the Anointed One] will baptize you with holy breath and fire." All of what John had mentioned was in the context of the upcoming destruction of the Temple. Did Jesus maintain that context? Yes. We know this because he concluded the same conversation with a direct reference to it: "And look, I am

with you all the days, until the conclusion of the age.”³ Luke intended for his reader to understand that Jesus was referring to the same events and context that had been spelled out by John the Baptizer three years earlier. The Anointed One had not yet brought in what Luke labels “**the promise**,” but this was about to happen after the ascension. In the intervening days, the Eleven replaced Judah so that the number of the envoys would be restored to the symbolic number Twelve. In Acts 2 we then read about the fulfillment of the promise to bring holy breath:

And on the full day of Pentecost, [the Twelve] were all one at the same place. And suddenly a sound from the sky happened, like that of a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And they observed with them forked tongues, like fire, that sat on each one of them. And they were all **filled with holy breath**, and they began to speak in other tongues, saying what the Spirit gave them to say. Now, there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, pious men from every nation under heaven. Now when this sound happened, the crowd came together and was confused because each one heard their speech in his own language. Now they were astonished, and they wondered, saying, "Look, aren't all of these ones who are speaking Galilaeans? And how is each one of us hearing in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes, and Elamites, and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Judea, and also Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Frugia and also Pamphulia, Egypt, and the parts of Lybia near Kurene, and the Roman strangers – Jews and also proselytes, Cretans and Arabians. We hear them speaking in our own languages the great things of God." Now they were all astonished and confused, saying (one to another), "What will this be?" Now others were scoffing and said that "they have been filled with sweet wine." (Ac 2:1-13)

There is a lot here. First of all, the Twelve were gathered together with the crowds that were observing the feast of Pentecost, and then something happened. That this was the event that Jesus was talking about – the event forecast by John the Baptizer – is easily seen in Acts 11, for Peter remarked about Kornelius’ household, “Now as I began to speak, the holy Spirit fell on them, just as on us also in the beginning. And I remembered the declarations of the Lord, how he said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized in holy breath.' Therefore, since God gave them, who trusted in the Lord Anointed Jesus, the same gift as he gave also to us, now who was I to be able to restrain God?"

We know, therefore, that the two parallel events in Acts 2 and 10 were the fulfillment of the prophecy made by John the Baptizer about things that would happen in the time leading up to the destruction of the temple. Exactly what was happening here?

The author seems to be at a loss to describe the event. He does not say that there was wind and fire at the event. On the contrary, Luke only tells his reader that there was a **sound** like rushing wind and something that **looked like** fire. His use of the word “tongues” to describe the fire is almost certainly deliberate and symbolic. The Greek word for “tongues” (γλῶσσαι) is the same word for “languages.” Therefore, the people saw what looked like “tongues” and they heard “languages”; it is a word game. The proximity between “tongues like fire” and “speak in other tongues” is intentional, for the visual symbol represented the audible miracle.

³ John’s account concludes similarly with the rumor that John would live until that Second Coming in AD 70.

What about the sound that was like wind? This is the same play on words that we have read before. The Aramaic words for “breath,” “wind,” and “spirit” are all the same. In Greek, the word used here is different than the usual cognate term (ἀνεμος). The word here is πνοή, which is closer in spelling to the Greek word for spirit (πνεῦμα) – a word that may also signify a wind (as in John 3), for both come from the verb πνέω (to breathe or blow). So in this case, too, the crowd had a physical sign to confirm the presence of the breath.

The nature of the miracle is one of both speaking and hearing. The Twelve “**began to speak with other languages.**” Specifically, they were speaking in the languages of the Jewish people who were gathered there from all nations (Mt 28). What were they saying? The Twelve were praising God. Those who were receptive wanted to know about this miracle, and those who were not receptive thought they must be drunk.

Now Peter, standing up with the Eleven, raised his voice and spoke clearly to them:

"Men, Judeans and all those who are staying in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and heed my declarations.

"For these are not drunk as you are assuming, for it is the third hour of the day! On the contrary, **this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel,**

"“And it will be in later days,” says God, “I will pour out from my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young will see visions, and your elderly will dream dreams.

"“And indeed on my male slaves and on my female slaves I will pour out from my spirit in those days,” and they will prophesy.

"“And I will give **wonders** in the sky above and **signs** on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and majestic day of Yahweh comes. And it shall be that each one who may call on the name of Yahweh will be saved.” (Ac 2:14ff.)

The Twelve had not been speaking publicly; they had been attendees like everyone else. However, when they heard the accusation that these followers of Jesus might be intoxicated, Peter felt compelled to speak. These people are not drunk as they are speaking in other languages. No, this was just like what Joel had written about. With that statement, Peter identified the day’s event with something important. The occurrence of the miraculous signs that day were connected with the sort of thing that had happened in the time of the prophet Joel. To understand more we need to examine Joel.

The setting for the book is around the time after the Exile. We see this from the description of the locusts:

“Have such things happened [before] in your days, or in the days of your ancestors? Tell your children about them, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. What the shearing locust left, the increasing locust has eaten, and what the increasing locust left the nibbling locust has eaten, and what the nibbling locust left the finishing locust has eaten.” (Joel 1)

This series of locusts represents the swarm of nations that invaded the area around Israel – one after the other. The Assyrians came in, then the Babylonians, then the Persians, and then their successors. Is this mere speculation about the current state of affairs? No. In verse 6 the voice of God states overtly that he is concerned about **nations overrunning the land**. In Peter’s reapplication, it is the leaders of the religion of Priestly Judaism who have overrun the land. It is those leaders who were about to be judged.

As Joel continues, the prophet foretells a day of great judgment. The invaders from the north (either the later Persians, or the Greeks, or the Seleucids – depending on the time of authorship) were going to be driven out. In Peter's application, the Jewish leaders would be stripped of power. Peter affirms that the time leading up to that "great and majestic day of Yahweh" (the day of judgment) was occurring as he was speaking, for the promise (through John the Baptizer) of miraculous signs was just like the similar promise from Joel. The **"signs and wonders"** were associated with judgment against the faithless Israelites in this passage – just as they had been associated with the same judgment in Deuteronomy 29 and in Jeremiah 32.

The passage continues: *"For look, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Yehoshefat, and I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered among the nations, and have divided up my land, and have cast lots for my people, and have given a boy to be a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine, and have drunk it....Proclaim this among the nations: prepare war, stir up the warriors. Let all the men of war approach; let them march. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears."* (Joel 3:1-3; 9-10)

In the first century, the Jewish people regarded the Anointed One as a figure who would cause the same kinds of things to happen that were written here. There would be a conflict, and the Jewish people would achieve self-rule. This was a common theme in the Exilic and post-Exilic prophets. Peter said in Acts 2, "THIS IS HAPPENING NOW." The signs they were seeing showed that the kingdom had been restored. There was now a new, free, covenant that Jews everywhere could enter (see the parallel event in Acts 10). Both Peter and Joel indicate that the signs were going to be present **"until the great and majestic day of Yahweh."** The destruction of Jerusalem and end of Priestly Judaism was coming, and the period mentioned in the prophecy would soon pass, but the signs were there for the time being.

"Men, brothers, it is lawful to speak freely to you about our ancestor David: that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is among us until this day.

"So, since he was a prophet, and since he knew that God had sworn an oath to him that God would cause someone from the fruit of his loins to sit on his throne, he spoke with foresight about the resurrection of the Anointed One, that he was not abandoned into Hades, nor did his flesh see decay. This Jesus God raised up; of this we are all witnesses.

"Then when he was exalted to the right hand of God and received the **promise** of the holy Spirit from the Father, he poured out this, which you see and hear. ...

Now Peter, he said to them: "Change your minds, and let each of you be baptized on the name of Anointed Jesus into forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the **holy breath**, for to you is the **promise** – and to your children, and to all those who are far away – as many as Yahweh our god may call." (Ac 2, excerpts)

Peter's explanation continued with an exposition proving that Jesus indeed had been the Messiah: the same Jesus who had been crucified just over seven weeks earlier. People from all nations had flocked to Jerusalem. They heard and understood the message. Peter demonstrated that Jesus was the Anointed One. They responded to the message and became Christians. These travelers would go back to their countries with the message, and so the representative Twelve had spread the message of the Messiah's advent to "all nations" of devout Jews.

The expression that keeps occurring in reference to John the Baptizer's statement is "**the promise.**" Jesus received the promise from God, and poured out "this which you see and hear." And "the promise" of holy breath was for everyone in the context of the prophecy. That is, everyone who might become Christians until the great and majestic day of Yahweh. The signs served to separate Christians from the other Jewish people – proving which of Yahweh's followers had his approval.

Again the usage of "signs and wonders" in association with the holy breath and the upcoming judgment indicates that the context of the signs is the same here as it was in the Hebrew Bible. They established the truth of the new covenant, and the Israelites who rejected that truth were going to be destroyed (along with the Temple in Jerusalem).

The end of Acts 2 refers to "your children, and to all those who are far away – as many as Yahweh our god may call." Pentecostals infer that this means that the gifts were supposed to continue forever. The context of the passage is restricted, though, to the time between when Peter was speaking and the (yet unknown) time of the judgment – the one that we now know occurred in AD 70. The scope of the pronouncement includes everyone up until the "great and majestic day" when God destroyed the temple.

The Testimony of the Spiritual Gifts

Now brothers, I don't want you to be ignorant of the spiritual things. You know that when you were gentiles, you were being carried away (however you were led) by voiceless idols. So, I am making it known to you that no one speaking with God's breath says, "A curse on Jesus." And no one is able to say, "The Lord is Jesus," except in holy breath. Now there are different kinds of gifts, but the same breath. And there are different kinds of service, and the same Lord. And there are different kinds of workings, and the same god is working all things in all people.

Now each one is given the appearance of the breath for benefit. For to one indeed is given through the breath a saying of wisdom. But another receives a saying of knowledge according to the same breath. To another is given trust, in the same breath. Now to another is given free gifts of healings in the breath. Now to another is given workings of power, to another prophecy, to another careful judgment of spirits. To another is given kinds of languages, but to another the translation of languages. But in all these things, the one and the same spirit is working, distributing as it wishes to everyone. (1C 12:1-11)

The context here concerns Messianic Jews (Christians) in relation to the other Jews. An inspired person was from God; he wouldn't curse the Messiah. Similarly, if someone acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, his gift was genuine. There are other passages that refer to the gifts as a sign. Acts 19 is one such passage. More notably, John refers to it as a sign that the Christians had God's approval (by comparison to the other Jewish people).

Everyone who trusts that Jesus is the Anointed One has been fathered by God. And everyone who loves the one who fathers *a child* also loves the one who is fathered by him. In this way we know that we love God's children: when we love God and are doing his precepts. For this is God's love: that we keep his precepts, and his precepts are not burdensome, because everyone who was fathered by God is victorious over creation. And this is the victory which is victorious over creation: our trust.

Now who is the one who is victorious over creation, if not the one who trusts that Jesus is God's son? This is the one who comes by water and blood, Anointed Jesus. Not in water only, but in water and blood. And the breath is the one who testifies, because the breath is the truth. Because there are three who testify: the breath, and the water, and the blood; and the three have one *testimony*.

... And this is the testimony:

That God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his son. The one who has the son has the life; the one who does not have the son does not have the life. (1J 5:1ff.)

The three witnesses that separated them from Priestly Judaism include the “blood” – the event of Jesus’ crucifixion, the “water” – the event of their baptism (a public act of separation from Judaism), and the “breath” – the group’s possession of the spiritual gifts. These were a sign from God that Jesus’ interpretation of the Torah was right. Jesus really was the Messiah! Paul refers to his giftedness as the “**signs of an envoy**” (2C 12).⁴

The Nature of the Spiritual Gifts

Christians after the first century often misunderstood the spiritual gifts that they read about. There was a hierarchy of the gifts based on their importance to Christianity and to the local assembly.

“And God indeed set some in the assembly first to be envoys, second prophets, third teachers, then powers, then free gifts of healings, of assistance, of guidance, of kinds of languages. Not all are envoys; not all are prophets; not all are teachers; not all work powers; not all have the free gift of healings; not all speak in languages; not all translate. But be jealous for the greater gifts.” (1C 12)

The “greater” gifts included prophecy, inspired teaching, and powers (miracles). The other things were considerably less important, but it is those other things that were (and are) easier to counterfeit. Rather than accuse anyone in Corinth of counterfeiting one gift or another, he simply urged them to ask God for prophecies (that would help everyone) – and to focus instead on Love, which is a complete revelation of God’s nature.

The gift of prophecy signified a warning from God (for the group or individual) with a focus on the future. It helped the entire group. The gift of speaking in another language was beneficial only if someone was there who understood the message and could translate it (from Latin, or whatever) for the entire group. Otherwise, it was something that would only benefit an individual – because that person would know that God was speaking through him or her. But again all of these gifts were granted within the scope of the Joel prophecy and the prophecy of John the Baptizer.

1 Corinthians 13

I read all the time about 1st Corinthians 13 and the gifts. Those who support the viewpoint of modern Pentecostal/Charismatics usually say that “the complete thing” in the chapter is connected with the (future) second coming of Jesus. As one commentator online put it, “This can only describe the world after the second coming of Christ.” On the other side, those who set out to oppose the Pentecostal viewpoint claim that “the complete thing” is the New Testament.

⁴ Indeed, the signs of an envoy were worked out among you with all endurance: signs and wonders and powers.

“With the completion of Apostolic testimony and the completion of the Scriptures of truth (“the faith once for all delivered to the saints”, Jude 3. R.V.), “that which is perfect” had come, and the temporary gifts were done away.”⁵

Even the modern editions (which are more sensitive to the disagreement over the issue) retain most of the language, “With the completion of the Canon of Scripture, prophecy apparently passed away, 1 Cor 13:8, 9.”

The Friends of the Nazarene write, “...we believe the "complete" thing which arrives in 1 Corinthians 13:10 is that state of maturity following the completion of the Christian canon. It is our own conviction that the entire New Testament canon was finished by the year 100 AD. Thereafter, we would expect the special pneumatic gifts in 1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13, and 14 would cease or pass away.”

The passage itself says no such thing, nor does it appear to look ahead toward a specific time when all of the gifts would be abolished. Let’s examine the context.

Love suffers long; it is kind. **Love** is not jealous. **Love** does not promote itself. It is not puffed up. It is not *showy*. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily provoked. It does not record bad things. It does not rejoice over injustice, but it rejoices together with the truth. It covers all, trusts all, hopes all, endures all.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will pass away. Where there are languages, they will cease. Where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but the partial things will pass away when the complete thing comes.

For we see now a riddle through glass, but then we will see face to face. I still know partially, but then I will know fully, just as I am known fully. But now these three remain: trust; hope; **love**. And the greatest of these is **love**. Pursue **love**, but be jealous for the spiritual things.

The context of the passage begins and ends with references to Love, and there is an enormous focus on Love in the passage. Love is the “complete thing.” The passage does not predict a specific future time when all of the gifts would cease, but instead it focuses the readers on pursuing love instead of the miraculous signs.

Pseudo-Mark and the Signs in the Second Century

Pseudo-Mark 16 contains a segment that begins with “Now these signs will follow those who do trust.” This is not an authentic part of the New Testament and as probably written in response to the mid-second century schools of thought. In the 3rd quarter of the II century, the followers of various schools of thought (e.g., Markion's) had concocted various means of supposedly proving that their way of thinking was the right one. Several of them alleged to trace their beliefs back to Jesus through a series of students: Jesus taught this guy, who taught this other guy, who taught this third guy, who taught **me**. Another means of establishing one's identity was the occurrence of the "spiritual gifts", which some early writers claimed had disappeared in the First Century. If a group could pretend to demonstrate that they still possessed the gifts, then they could use that as leverage to prove that their teachings were the

⁵ *Expository Dictionary*, W.E. Vine, 1951 edition

correct interpretations of what Jesus had taught. Tertullian himself claimed that his group, not Markion's, practiced the genuine gifts – Markion's "gifts" were regarded as fraudulent. We read about this claim in the Letter of Bar-Nabas also, "God ... himself prophesies in us, he himself lives in us, opening the door of the temple for us who had been in bondage to death."

Were they really asserting that they possessed the signs while others claimed they did not? Yes, for in the 3rd quarter of the II century, Justin made this claim in the style of a dialogue with a Jewish person: "For the prophetic gifts remain with us, even to the present time. And so you should understand that those things that were once among your nation have been transferred to us. Now just as there were false prophets contemporaneous with your holy prophets, so are there now many false teachers among us..."⁶ The claim of "false teachers" was an assertion that the Christians who did not possess such gifts were liars.

It is in this atmosphere that the long ending of Mark was born. The author had in his possession a copy of Mark – possibly containing the short ending – as well as one of Luke (the account relied upon by Markion) and a portion of the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* known as the *Acts of Pilatus*. The author of the long ending follows these sources wherever he does not deliberately adding original material that supports his group.

The long ending starts a bridge where Mark left off (16:8), then immediately begins summarizing the ending found in Luke. After following Luke through 24:44, the Freer Logion – clearly a still later addition – occurs. The second-century author resumes, paraphrasing Luke's account of the Great Commission in Lk 24:45-7, based on the wording from the apocryphal *Acts of Pilatus*.

Now a certain priest named Phineas, and Addas a teacher, and Aggaeus a Levite, came down from Galilaiah into Jerusalem and spoke to the rulers of the synagogue and the priests and the Levites, saying: "We saw Jesus and his students sitting on the mountain which is called Mamilch, and he said to his students: 'Go into all the creation and herald to all the creation. The one who trusts and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not trust will be condemned.' And while Jesus was still speaking to his students we saw him taken up into heaven."

The Gospel of Nicodemus indicates (10:20, cited above) that after the Great Commission Jesus said something about baptism. The author of the long ending includes the wording of the Great Commission from the Acts and then the statement about baptism. That the *Acts of Pilate* were written earlier (at least in some form) is evidenced by references to it and by the fact that the Acts nowhere else refer to Mark. Consequently, the ending of Mark quotes from it, and not vice versa.

Following his citation from the apocryphal work (which he clarifies), the author inserts the passage which was the purpose for the ending: the manifesto for identifying believers by the spiritual gifts. The author believes that his own group and not any of the opposing groups of Christians would be found to possess the genuine gifts.

After the new portion, the author returns to Luke (24:50-1), mentioning the ascension. Finally, the short ending of Mark occurs – but in an altered state. The reference to the "heralding" of the Eleven appears here, along with the assertion that they went out everywhere, but the author paraphrases the short

⁶ *Dialogue With Trypho*, Justin (c. 160), ch. 82.

ending so as to include a mention of the accompanying signs that the new author alleges Jesus to have just mentioned. The long ending gave fuel to support the groups that supported their authority by claiming to possess the spiritual gifts instead of appealing to disciplic succession.

This Means All Modern Miracles are Fake, Right?

No.

Whatever has been going on since the first century and whatever happened before the first century have nothing to do with the spiritual gifts mentioned in connection with confirming the truth of God's message through Jesus the Messiah. Those gifts were intended to demonstrate which branch of Yahweh worshipers had God's approval, and to herald the end of the age. Such things were very useful at a time while the Temple was still standing, because references to the Temple and temple worship are all over the Hebrew Bible (and Septuagint). With the priesthood gone, their purpose has expired.

However, God spoke to people before Jesus came, and nothing in the Bible prevents him from speaking to people afterward. God answered prayers back then, and this is a form of miracle on its own. If you ask God to heal someone, and God heals them, then that's a miracle. If, through response to a prayer, God never answers changes anything that is already going to happen, then the prayer itself would be useless for that purpose. Yet the Bible does not merely state that prayers are for our comfort; on the contrary, Jesus and the envoys urged everyone to persistently ask for good things from God ... trusting that he wants for us to have good things. We shouldn't treat God like Santa Claus, but if God answers a prayer, it certainly does not mean that whatever winds up happening was what was already going to happen before we prayed.

For when the Lord speaks once or a second time in a dream, or in the meditation of the night; (as when a deep sleep seizes people, in slumberings on the bed): then he opens people's minds: he scares them with such fearful images to turn a person away from injustice, and he rescues his body from being a corpse. He spares also his life from death, and to not die in war. (Job 33:14-18)

Although dreams and visions are not always communications from God, according to the Bible they can be – and not just for prophets with a message for all the people. The following people were ones in the Bible to whom God spoke and who were not given a prophetic message for Israel:

Cain (Gen 4:6)

Noah's sons (Gen 9)

Job and his friends (Job 38-42)

Abimelech (Gen 20:3-7)

Isaac (Gen 26:24)

Jacob (Gen 28:13-15)

Joseph, through dreams (Gen 37)

Joshua (Jos 6:2-5)

Solomon, who asks for wisdom (1 Kgs 3:5-15)

Jehu (1 Kgs 16:1-4)

Ahaz (Isa 7:10-25)

Manasseh and his people (2Ch 33:10)

Even the woman in Acts who was advised by what she believed to be Apollo's spirit obtained genuine visions that came true. The only evil part of the account was that people were making money off of her gift.

Now it happened, as we were going to a place of prayer, a certain female servant who was possessed by a spirit of Puthonos came to meet us. She brought her lords much financial gain through divination. She was following Paulus and us closely, and she called out, saying, "These people are slaves of the highest god, who are announcing a way of salvation to us!" Now she did this for many days. (Ac 16)

The following Biblical miracles were not associated with the ushering in of either covenant, or with the destruction of the temple (or judgment on Israel) but they happened nevertheless:

Balaam's donkey protects him and speaks (Num 22)

Samson's strength (Judg. 14-16)

A widow's son was raised from the dead (1 Kgs 17)

Elijah prays and there is fire (and later, rain) (1 Kgs 18)

Elisha purifies the waters of Jericho (2 Kgs 2)

One hundred men miraculously fed at Gilgal (2 Kgs 4)

Elisha's bones raise the dead (2 Kgs 13)

Divine protection from fire (Dan 3)

What about divine inspiration? Several passages affirm that inspiration came to gentiles as well as Jews:

And indeed he is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and are moved and exist, just as also some of those poets with you have said, "For we are also his offspring."⁷ Therefore, since we are God's offspring, we are bound not to imagine that gold or silver or stone – a sculpture of art and of human skill – is like the Divine One. (Ac 17)

A certain one of their own, a prophet, said, "Kretans are always liars, malevolent wild animals, lazy gluttons." (Epimenides of Crete) This testimony is true. (Ti 1:12)

Do not be led astray: "Bad relationships corrupt beneficial ethics." (from the prologue to Menander's play, *Thais*) (1C 15:33)

In addition, when Paul tells the story of his own conversion to Agrippa – but not to the Jewish leaders – he appears to cite Aeschylus' play, *Agamemnon* (line 1624). Jesus appears to paraphrase Epicurus and possibly Aesop as well: "The wise man feels no more pain when being tortured himself than when his friend is tortured, and he will die for him." (Epicurus, Vatican Saying 56)

The Bible does not point to any specific time when all forms of inspiration would cease. Neither does it say that God will stop answering prayers. To the contrary, several passages appear to point to God listening and responding to the prayers of his people. God does not give everyone what they wish for, but he gives them what they need. God is still active, whether or not the miraculous gifts were limited in scope to the First Century.

Does that leave room for the likes of Muhammad? Or Joseph Smith? Or Charles Taze Russell? Yes, it does. Both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament talk about determining whether or not a prophecy is genuine. Those guidelines still hold today. Does it validate those people? No. If a person foretells only true events, then (s)he is a genuine prophet; if (s)he foretells something that doesn't happen during their lifetime, then that person is faking it. If someone claims that God gave them a bit of wisdom or

⁷ *Phaenomena*, 5, Aratus, 315 – 240 BCE.

knowledge, test to see whether what they teach is consistent with the Torah (as Jesus explained it). If someone heals your illness, thank God for it. If someone asks for money, that person is a charlatan...a crook. ["For we are not like the rest, who sell God's message for money." (2C 3)] Otherwise, we shouldn't doubt that God still inspires the ideas of people today.

Ultimately, though, it comes down to this. If you are gifted, use your gift freely to help others. If you see others claiming to have gifts, don't be fast to judge them one way or the other. They might be crooks, but they might be honest truth-seekers. I mind my own business where such things are concerned. It is not my job to defend or to condemn everyone out there who claims that God has touched them in some way. I will not attribute to God anything that I have carried out, but neither do I want to attribute to a human being something that God has done.

Discussion and Rebuttal

John Noë has posted objections to God's having promised the miraculous signs only for a short time.⁸ We will quote from his paper on the subject here – indented and with a black color. At first he poses specific questions. Let us answer those in the order in which he asked them.

Emphatically, Jesus declared that “heaven and earth will pass away [that was the Old Covenant system], but my words will never pass away” (Matt. 24:35). His words would surely include everything recorded in the New Testament regarding his kingdom and doing his works and even greater works, would they not? Then why would God have withdrawn the supernatural empowerment it takes to do them?

No, his words do not include the New Testament. He had specific “words” in mind. The context of that sentence is a discussion of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70.

"Now learn from the analogy of the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and it puts out its leaves, you know that the summer is near. In the same way also, when **you** notice all these things, know that he is near, at the doors. Indeed I am telling **you** that by no means will **this generation** pass away until all these things happen. The sky and the land will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away. But about that day and hour no one knows...."

Jesus' statement was an assurance, an affirmation in the trustworthiness of what he had **just said before that**, namely, that it was certain that the temple would be destroyed in that same generation. The sentence is in precisely the same context in both Mark's account (ch. 13) and Luke's (ch. 21). The context extends no further than that. Jesus was only saying, **"You can be absolutely certain that people who are living today will live until the time when the temple is destroyed."** That's all. His words mean nothing about "doing his works," because that wasn't what he was talking about.

Also, do his claims for having "all authority in heaven and on earth" and command "to teach them [and us] to obey everything I have commanded you to do" (Matt. 28:18-20) still apply?

No. That sentence was merely a reiteration to the Twelve to complete **their** mission soon after his death. He had told them something that they could have interpreted to be limited to his time on earth:

Now the names of the Twelve envoys are these: first Simon who is called Peter and Andreas his brother; and Jacob the son of Zebedaiiah and Johannes his brother; Filippus and Bar-Talmai; Thomas and Matthaiah the tribute taker; Jacob the son of Alfeus; and Thaddeus; Simon the Jealous; and Judah Iscariot (the one who also delivered him up). Jesus sent out these twelve, charging them, saying, "You should not go out into a road of gentiles, and you should not enter into a city of Samaritans. But **go instead to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**. Now after you go, herald, saying that, 'The kingdom of the heavens has neared.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out spirit beings. You have received freely; give freely."

⁸ "Cessation Theology – 14 Classic Objections," John Noë, 2016.

If we examine the parallel passage in Luke and the behavior of the Twelve after Jesus' death, we see that they never understood Mt 28:19 to be a general mission – either of themselves or of God's people at large.

Then he opened their minds to understand the writings, and he said to them, "Thus it was written for the Anointed One to suffer and to be resurrected from among the dead during the third day, and for mental change to the point of forgiveness of errors to be heralded in his name to **all nations**, beginning from Jerusalem. **You are witnesses** of these things. And look, I am sending my Father's promise upon **you**, but **you** are to remain connected with the city until **you** are empowered with power from on high."

The Twelve [not everyone] were told to go wait in Jerusalem until they received power. They were told to testify to what they personally had witnessed about Jesus during his time on earth. They were heralding the coming of the Messiah to Jews of all nations. They were supposed to speak when God empowered them. That's the context also of the parallel passage in Matthew.

Luke explains this even further at the beginning of Acts, informing us about even more details of the context of the sending of the Twelve. Jesus **charged them "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise, which you heard from me, that 'John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized in holy breath' after not many of these days."**

Jesus mentions that the promise from God was the holy breath (a miraculous sign), and that they would be "baptized" in it in just a few days. That expression "baptized in holy breath" is used ***in fulfillment of the prophecy of John the Baptizer*** only twice: in Acts 2 and again in Acts 10 – each time with a reference to that prophecy. After they restored the number of Twelve, the mission of that group to tell Jews of all nations that Jesus was the Messiah would be completed quickly (in "not many of these days"). Following its completion, the envoys stayed in the surrounding area, even when there was persecution.

The context of the miraculous signs in Acts 2 was the same as the context of Jesus' promise for miraculous guidance to remain with the Twelve: until "the great and majestic day of Yahweh" (AD 70, cited from Acts 2) or "the conclusion of the age" (AD 70, cited from Mt 28:20). That "conclusion of the age" in Mt 28:20 is the same as the limited scope of the commission, as we have read already in Matthew 10:

"Now when they persecute you in this city, flee into the other. For indeed I am telling you: you should by no means complete the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes."

Deliver the message to Jews of all nations...until the Son of Man comes – until the end of the age. The absolute cut-off for the end of their mission was the Second Coming in AD 70. As it turned out, they delivered the message to all nations much more quickly than that.

The events at the beginning of Acts are staged in a deliberate order that leads up to Pentecost in chapter two. First, Luke reprises the end of his account of Jesus' time on earth. The additional details that he supplies at this time are those that are necessary in order to follow the literary narrative through to chapter two.

The remaining Eleven had asked about the Restoration of the Kingdom. Jesus informed them that this was about to happen in "not many" days, and instructed them to wait in the city until it did happen.

They were to know that the kingdom was being restored because they would receive a “baptism” in holy breath.

After this event, Luke records how the Eleven recognized it as necessary to restore the number to Twelve prior to the important event that was about to happen. He names the Eleven, just as all three synoptic authors did when the Twelve were sent out from the Mountain of Olive Trees the first time [Mt 10]. Peter, whose mind had been opened to understand the writings about the Messiah, explains how important it was to replace Judah; after this, he provides the necessary criteria that an envoy must fulfill:

"Therefore, it is necessary that those men who have associated with us during all the time in which the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, starting from John's baptism until the day on which he was taken from us--one of these is to become a witness of his resurrection with us."

It was necessary for an envoy ("apostle") to have been sent **by Jesus** as a herald. But to be a member of the Twelve more was required:

- The person had to have associated with Jesus ever since his baptism.
- The person had to have been a witness of (and sent out by) the resurrected Jesus.

Inclusion in the group who had been sent to Jews of all nations (Mt 10 = Mt 28) applied then to no one else and cannot apply today to anyone. Indeed they selected a suitable replacement, attributing the final choice to God, setting the stage for the important event.

Luke indicates that on the day of Pentecost the envoys were still all together "in one place" – possibly the same building where they had met in chapter 1. At this point, the Twelve -- whose number had just been restored -- were filled with holy breath. They were inspired.

*Now, there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, pious **men from every nation under heaven**. Now when this sound happened, the crowd came together and were confused because each one heard their speech in his own language.*

Jesus had earlier told the Twelve to wait in Jerusalem until empowered and to speak in the name of the Messiah to all nations. Luke sets up the reader so that he recognizes that this event fulfills the renewed commission (Lk 24:45-7; Mt 28:19; Mt 10:1f.) to the Twelve. First, the reader is taken outside the building. Everyone was **able to hear** what **sounded like** a rushing wind, and they headed toward this sound to see what it was. If Josephus' estimates for the year 65 are even close to the numbers for this year, there might have been as many as one MILLION people gathered for the feast! Luke points out that these were pious men. These are not the unlawful. These are the **Jews** who have been honestly seeking God, to the point at least where many had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem on foot (and possibly by ship) to participate in the feasts. These men had devoted their lives to God.

Since this event fulfills the commission to the Twelve, Luke was careful to point out where the men were from, naming various nations -- which comprise the region of Palestine plus all areas of the zodiac (i.e., people from all directions). He specifically writes that these men were "**from every nation under heaven**." In summary: the Twelve were reminded to take the message to Jews of all nations, then their number was restored, then the sign happened that they had been awaiting, and at Pentecost they fulfilled that commission.

After Peter cited a passage about the Restoration of the Kingdom to Israel (see Acts 1), applying it to that very day, he indicated that the signs they were seeing showed that the reapplication of Joel was happening. This was the restoration of the kingdom--and a time would follow where the Jewish people would dominate. There was then a new, free, covenant, but only Jews could enter...until Acts 10.

Peter and Joel also indicate that the signs would be present "until the great and majestic day of Yahweh." The destruction of Jerusalem and end of Priestly Judaism was coming, and the period mentioned in the prophecy would soon pass, but the signs would be here for the time being.

Important to our discussion of the Great Commission is the fact that Peter identified the Twelve as **witnesses** of Jesus' resurrection – exactly as Jesus had indicated that when the restoration of the kingdom would happen, they would be his witnesses (Lk 24 = Mt 28) and would take the message about the Messiah to Jews of all nations.

"Therefore, let all of the house of Israel know for sure that God made him both Lord and Anointed One -- this Jesus whom you have crucified."

Once again, Peter was not taking the message to gentiles, but he announces instead to "all of the house of Israel."

The Twelve were announcing God in public. They were Jesus' witnesses to Jews of all nations. The people **heard** the message. Those who were open to it **understood** the message. The next segment indicates that they **accepted** the message and realized that **Jesus had been the Anointed One** whom the Jewish people had been seeking.

And with many other words he testified and advised them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation."

"**This perverse generation**" was the generation which would have their temple and way of worship destroyed. The listeners should no longer identify themselves with "this generation." The expression had been used by Jesus frequently (and is especially prominent in Matthew's account). There is little doubt that Peter was borrowing the language of his teacher.

After a stay in Jerusalem, most of the travelers would return to the countries from which they originated, and the message literally went everywhere.

The Twelve from Pentecost to Paul

After the spread of the message to all nations in Acts 2, the Twelve are only mentioned once more in a present narrative sense. This occurs in Acts 6, when the poor were being neglected. After the advent of Paul, the Twelve were never mentioned in a present narrative. Neither do any of the letters mention the activities of "the Twelve" as a collective unit.

In Acts 3 – 7, the Twelve remained in Jerusalem. Far from applying Matthew 28 as a command for them to physically **go** to all nations, they stayed right where they were. They correctly understood that they had sent the message out to Jews of all nations. Even at Acts 8:1, when Jesus' followers were being persecuted, the Twelve **stayed in Jerusalem**. If any event could have been viewed as a time to get up and go, it would have been that persecution. However, they knew that their mission had been fulfilled.

Indeed, there were no gentile converts until after Paul. The followers of Jesus still attended synagogues and met in the temple courts. Acts 8 bridges the gap between Palestinian Jews and Paul. In it, the message explicitly reaches “fringe” Jews. Many Samaritans had heard the message – likely because of the people who had gone back to their own countries. They did not hear it through the envoys directly; the narrative says so. A eunuch was also a fringe Jew, since eunuchs were forbidden from even entering the tent of meeting (Deut 23:1), but Isaiah 56 (not cited in Acts) appears to indicate that in reality God himself had no problem with eunuchs. Who brought the message to the eunuch? Philip – not one of the Twelve.

Peter Told to Teach to Gentiles

When God wanted the envoys of Jesus to bring the message of freedom to gentiles, he made sure that they understood the change. In Acts 10, God first sent a divine messenger to the gentile, Cornelius, telling him to get Peter.

At Pentecost, Peter did not speak until he was compelled to do so. This time [Acts 10], he had been sent by God.

"The message that he sent to the sons of Israel announced the good message of peace through Anointed Jesus."

Until this time, God's message, "the good message of peace," had been sent only to "the sons of Israel." But the Messiah is everyone's Lord -- Peter now knew this.

After this, the Jewish people agree that gentiles can be part of their (Christian) group: *"Now when they heard these things, they were quiet, and they glorified God, saying, 'Then God has also given to the gentiles the change of mind that leads into life!'"*

This astonishment makes sense. Peter and the Twelve had been sent out to Jews in the name of their Messiah. Why would gentiles be involved at all? Even after this point in time, though, Peter did not regard himself or the others as having been sent to gentiles in general. Their mission was to the Jewish people.

Referring Back to the Inclusion of Gentiles

Throughout the remainder of the New Testament, **no author ever** refers to Matthew 28:19 as including gentiles. Even in Acts, when they discuss the gentiles being admitted into the covenant, they make no reference to the Great Commission since it was for Jews alone. Specifically, we read:

Now the envoys and the elderly got together to look into this matter. Now since there was much debate, Peter got up and said to them, "Men, brothers: you are familiar that from days past God chose from among you, that through my mouth the gentiles would hear the account of the good message and would trust. And God, who knows hearts, testified to them, giving them the holy Spirit just as he gave to us. And he judged no differently between us and them also, having cleansed their hearts through trust."

Instead of addressing Matthew 28, Peter pointed out the revelation that he had received from God to take the message to gentiles. This (Acts 10) was the first anyone had ever heard of a "gentile mission," and so it made sense for the person who had received that revelation to be the first to make an address on the topic.

After this, they would also hear from another respected Jewish (Christian) leader about the time when gentiles were first considered acceptable:

Now after they were silent, Jacob answered, saying, "Men, brothers: hear me. Simeon told how God first visited to take from the nations a people for his name." (Acts 15)

It was Jacob (or "James," if you prefer), perhaps the most respected Christian in Jerusalem, Jesus' own (half) brother, who addressed the group next. He confirmed Peter's story, referring to him by his Jewish name of "Simeon." Jacob's confirmation comes not only from his own opinion that Peter had been truthful but also from an application of the Prophets. Jacob cites the portion of Amos 9 [agreeing with the Septuagint] where "the rest of humanity" and "all the nations where my name is called" were brought together to seek out God, and he reapplies it to his own time.

What they **never** believed was that the Twelve had been sent to herald to gentiles. Instead, Jacob affirms that the first mention of a gentile mission came when Peter spoke to Cornelius. Even in Acts 15, Matthew 28:19 did not apply to anyone but the Twelve, and it did not include gentiles. The date here was about AD 47-50, but later writings agree with this that the message was not sent out to gentiles from the beginning.

In Romans 1, written in 54 or 55, Paul writes that the message was being announced "both for the Jew **first** and for the Greek." He repeats the expression twice more.

In Galatians 2, written in 56, Paul reflects back on the meeting in Acts 15.

But on the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the good message to the foreskinned, just as Peter to the circumcised, and when they realized the generosity that had been granted me, Jacob and Peter and Johannes (those who are thought to be pillars) gave Bar-Nabas and me the right hand of fellowship.

Paul's account of that meeting clearly indicates his own understanding of the Great Commission. Peter, Jacob, and John had recognized Paul as an equal and acknowledged that the Twelve had been sent with the good message to their fellow Jews while Paul had been given the same message to take to gentiles. Even at that point, six to nine years later, they all understood that the commission in Mt 28:19 was limited in scope to Jewish converts.

If Mt 28:19 *had intended* for the Twelve to go to everyone, then the Eleven (who could understand all of the writings about the Messiah) **never** realized it. They never refer back to it. They never applied the inclusion of gentiles to Mt 28:19 – not even after Acts 10, and not even after meeting with Paul. None of the eleven hearers of the commission took it to include Gentiles--never in their lives. When they did meet Paul, he understood everything **the way that they did**, even though he himself *had been sent to gentiles*. He never extended the sending of the Twelve to include gentiles. Furthermore, none of the writers ever extended the commission to include anyone other than the Twelve.

The Twelve After Pentecost

When the Twelve replaced Judah, there were two people who were qualified, but the number had to be twelve. The number was deliberate; it represented the number of the tribes of Israel (Rev 21:12-4). Therefore, while their mission had yet to be fulfilled, they realized that it was necessary to restore the number to twelve. Yet by the time of Jacob's death (Acts 12), there was no need to replace him. After all, their mission was complete. The Twelve as a unit were no longer necessary; their collective purpose had been fulfilled.

Let us continue to examine Noë's list of questions.

"And in the church God has appointed . . ." (1 Cor. 12:28 – see the list on p. 2, again).
Isn't the Church still here?

Noë cites this passage:

Now you are the Anointed One's body, and compose it partially as members. And God indeed set some in the assembly first to be envoys, second prophets, third teachers, then powers, then free gifts of healings, of assistance, of guidance, of kinds of languages. Not all are envoys; not all are prophets; not all are teachers; not all work powers; not all have the free gift of healings; not all speak in languages; not all translate. But be jealous for the greater gifts.

Yes, those things were there THEN. Just as they wrote of the temple as still standing – because it was – they spoke and wrote about the miraculous signs being present, because they were. The signs are not present now, and neither is the temple. During the transitional period the gifts were provided in order to identify which group of Yahweh-worshippers comprised God's people. This is precisely why the sign of the speaking in other languages was "a sign not to those who trust but to those who are untrusting." **They** already knew that they were the Jewish sect that had God's approval. The outsiders, who were called to choose between what Jesus was teaching and Priestly Judaism, had the signs there in order to testify that the Christians were the group that belonged to God, for Jesus (as Moses' successor) had brought the new covenant, and God was about to judge the faithless Israelites.

Paul knew that the signs were only temporary and partial views of God. That is why he urged them to pursue Love most of all (1C 13). Chapter 13 is the center and core of the whole discussion (1C 12-14).

Noë continues.

Being "in Christ" and in "one body" (Rom. 12:5-8). Is this still applicable? Or is there a major difference between then and now—i.e., one with these gifts and one without?

In the context in which Paul was writing, he said that the different miraculous signs that each of them possessed were not in competition with one another but were like the different parts of a human body. While we may make another application of the same metaphor if we like, Paul only intended that one context when he wrote – a context that no longer applies. This is **not** applicable in the same sense today.

Jesus prayed for "oneness" in his prayer for all believers (John 17:11, 20-23). But how much "oneness" is "oneness" today?

"Oh holy Father, keep in your name those whom you have given to me, [so that they may be one as we are]."

In the same passage – as in the discourse at large – Jesus repeatedly brings up the message that he had given to the Twelve. Stating here that “your message is Truth,” he prompts the listener (and reader) to think about what he has already explained about that message. The message is that the Torah was internal, not external. Jesus internalized the principles of a place of worship (Jn 4), fatherhood and sonship (Jn 8), ritual cleanliness (Mt 23, etc.), adultery and murder (Mt 5-6), the Sabbath (Jn 7:19f., etc.), and many other concepts that they had regarded externally. He had summarized the whole duty of humanity into a simple principle: “Love Yahweh, and love your neighbor,” so that John would later write: **And this is his precept: that we should trust the name of his son, Anointed Jesus, and that we should love one another**, just as he gave us the precept. And the one who keeps his precepts remains in him, and he in them.

And Paul wrote also:

Owe nothing to anyone except love to one another. For the one who loves the other is fulfilling the Torah. For there is this: **“You will not commit adultery. You will not murder. You will not steal. You will not strongly desire.”** And if there is any other precept, it is brought under a head by this saying, **“You will love your neighbor as yourself.”** Love for your neighbor works no wrong. Therefore, **love is a fulfillment of the Torah.** (Rom 13)

This is the unity: love. A person is one with others and God if that person loves. This is the reason why John reports that the conclusion of the passage about the unity of believers ends with a reflection about Love: **“...they may be completed into one, so that the creation may know that you sent me and loved them as you loved me.”** When Jesus’ followers love one another, it demonstrates God’s love and proves that Jesus had been sent by God.

Holy Spirit and Holy Breath

Noë continues.

Is the same Holy Spirit Who healed people through Jesus, Paul, the apostles, and others back then still the same Holy Spirit Who heals today through God’s people, prayer, and other means, as God wills?

There is more than one Greek expression that gets translated by most translators as “Holy Spirit.” One of these, (το πνευμα το ἅγιον) indicates God in communication with humanity. It is the holy Spirit that miraculously reminded the Twelve of those things that Jesus had taught them while they were with him. Another expression (πνευμα ἅγιον = “holy breath”) typically indicates something miraculous, as when Miriam was found to be pregnant by holy breath, or when people were filled with holy breath. In Acts we see that when God grants holy breath he is sometimes referred to as the holy Spirit.

God performed miracles through inspired people back then. God is active today as he wishes to be. That does not include the miraculous signs separating Priestly Judaism from the teaching of the spiritual Torah – because Priestly Judaism no longer exists. God does indeed answer prayers and may perform miracles by himself as he wishes; such things are outside of the scope of the miraculous signs.

Noë asks another question.

Paul called the Colossians to be “fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11). Then how much of the kingdom of God are we moderns to be workers thereof?

That’s not what he said. Paul said that there were only certain Jewish people who were also working with him in spreading the message [about the internal Torah]. These were Paul’s only coworkers for the spiritual kingdom.

Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner, greets you; also, Markus the nephew of Bar-Nabas (You received instructions about him to receive him if he should come to you.), and Yeshua who is called Just. These people who are of the circumcision, **these alone are my coworkers** for God's kingdom. They have become a comfort to me.

He did not tell the readers that they were coworkers. When Paul used the expression “coworker” he always meant an inspired person who had been sent from town to town, as Paul had been sent. There were only three people in the passage who were his coworkers. Thus he distinguishes his coworkers from his readers in Corinth:

Now the planter [Paul] and the waterer [Apollos] are one, but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For **we are** God's coworkers. **You are** God's farm...God's building.

Noë’s next question:

If these gifts were the distinctive mark of the New Testament believers, along with their message, then what is our mark today that distinguishes us from non-believers?

The miraculous signs were **not** there to distinguish them from non-believers. The signs were there to distinguish the Messiah and his spiritual Torah from the high priests and their ritual religion of Priestly Judaism. Thus, when Peter explains those very same signs to the crowd at Pentecost, he explicitly notes the time frame as being that prior to the destruction of the temple, that great and majestic day of Yahweh.

...this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel, ““And it will be in later days,” says God , “I will pour out from my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy, and your young will see visions, and your elderly will dream dreams.”
“And indeed on my male slaves and on my female slaves I will pour out from my spirit in those days,” and they will prophesy.”
“And I will give wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and majestic day of Yahweh comes.”

The signs testified that among the Jewish people, Jesus’ followers were the ones with God’s approval. They were the ones who had eternal life, and whose access to a relationship with God would continue after the temple was destroyed.

Noë’s next question follows:

In Christ they became “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). What are we today partaking of—the lesser traditions of men (see Mark 7:13; Matt. 15:6)?

The divine nature consists of positive internal attributes of the sort that Jesus described in Matthew 5 – 7. Becoming partners (ones who share) in a divine nature meant accumulating more of these things that Paul labels the spirit's fruit. Jesus identified the focus as being on Trust and Love, and so 2 Peter gives a list of the attributes that are part of sharing in a divine nature. That list begins with Trust and culminates with Love:

Hello to you, and let peace be multiplied to you in the recognition of God and of Jesus our Lord, just as his divine power has given **us** [the apostles] all things which direct toward life and piety, through the recognition of the one who called **us** [the apostles] to his own glory and virtue, through which the valuable and great promises have been given to **us** [the apostles], so that through this **you** [the readers] might become partners in a divine nature, since you have fled from the corruption which is in creation in strong desire.

And now, for this same reason, bring in all diligence and to your trust add virtue,
and to the virtue add knowledge,

and to the knowledge add self-control,

and to the self-control add endurance,

and to the endurance add piety,

and to the piety add brotherly affection,

and to the brotherly affection add love.

Paul created a similar list of relationship qualities when he wrote to the Galatians: "But the spirit's fruit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, truthfulness, trust, meekness, self-control. The Torah is not against these." Since "God is love," as John put it, participating in the divine nature means having these attributes evident in your life.

Noë's next question:

Are we now to believe that God has brought back the delivery truck to earth and repossessed parts of his "once for all delivered faith" (Jude 3), post A.D. 70 or at the end of the 1st century?

When Judah wrote

Beloved, in making all haste to write to you about our common salvation, [The judgment on Priestly Judaism is coming soon!] I had a necessity to write to you, advising you to agonize for the trust that was delivered over to the holy ones once. [God's message is Love and Trust – not ritual.] For certain people [Jewish religionists] have secretly crept in, who from ancient times were previously written about for this judgment: impious people, changing God's generosity into debauchery, and denying the only Sovereign and denying Anointed Jesus our Lord. [by advocating ritual religion]

...he did not have in mind the miraculous signs but the readers' trust that the judgment on Priestly Judaism was coming soon. "Salvation" in the New Testament normally refers to their access to God after the temple's destruction. They were being saved, rescued from the destruction of the Temple and their religion. The "certain people," we see in 2 Peter, were advocates of Priestly Judaism who were mocking the Christians because the temple was still standing:

Know this first: that in the last days [the time just prior to the temple's desolation] mockers will come in, mocking, walking according to their own strong desires and saying, "Where is the promise of his presence? For from the time when the ancestors went to sleep, all things have continued this way from the beginning of creation." [that is, the Temple is still here]

For it willingly escapes them that the heavens were of old, and the land was put together out of water and through water by God's statement. [The state of affairs before the flood only existed because God allowed it.] Through a statement, the creation that existed then [Noah's time] was drenched in water and was destroyed. But the present-day heavens and land [the current state of affairs with the temple and Priestly Judaism] have been treasured up by the same statement and are being kept until a day of judgment and of destruction of the impious people. [the end of Priestly Judaism]
... Now Yahweh's day [destruction of the temple] will arrive like a thief. In it, the heavens [current state of things] will be released with a roar. Now the elements will be released and burnt up, and will the land and all the deeds in it be found? [The author assured his readers that the temple was about to be destroyed.]

Therefore, the readers need to continue to trust God about the matter, just as Jesus trusted – and passed along that assurance to the apostles.

We no longer need that same trust because the event is past, but we are able to trust even more now – knowing that God kept his promise to them.

Noë's next question:

Are we no longer as blessed by God as they were—"with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. 1:3) and "not lack[ing] any spiritual gift" (1 Cor. 1:7)? Well, if these gifts and workings of the Holy Spirit ceased when withdrawn by God, then we today lack them, right?

Eph 1:3 (from Paul's open letter) has nothing to do with the miraculous signs. Paul writes about "praise" from several different angles. At first, including v. 3, all of that praise is connected with God and with the inspired apostles. NONE of it is connected with the readers, or with believers in general:

Praiseworthy is the God and Father of our Lord Anointed Jesus, who has **praised us** [apostles] with every spiritual **praise** in the heavenly places in the Anointed One, just as he chose **us** [apostles] in him before the laying down of creation, (for **us** [apostles] to be holy and blameless in his presence in love), having previously marked **us** [apostles] out for sonship through Anointed Jesus for him, according to what was the delight of his wishes, to the point of **our** [apostles] **praising** the glory of his generosity, with which he favored **us** [apostles] in the beloved one. In him, through his blood, **we** [apostles] have the redemption, the forgiveness of wanderings, according to the wealth of God's generosity. This generosity he made abundant for **us** [apostles] in all wisdom and intelligence, after making known to **us** [apostles] the secret of his wishes. ... In him also **we** [apostles] were given an inheritance, since **we** [apostles] were previously marked out according to the design of the one who is working in all things by the plan of his wishes, to the point where **we** [apostles] exist for a praise of his glory – **we** [apostles] who have previously hoped in the Anointed One.

When **you** [readers] heard the message of the truth—the good message of **your** [readers] salvation—and after trusting in him also, **you** [readers] were also sealed in him to the spirit of the promise to the holy one.

God was worthy of praise, and he himself had chosen to praise (bless) the apostles in various ways – most notably by allowing them to carry the message of the spiritual Torah (and destruction of the temple) to others. There is nothing here about the miraculous signs, nothing about the readers being blessed (praised), and nothing about access in the future to miraculous signs.

Furthermore, the context of 1 Cor 7 allows us to see that Paul was writing about relationship qualities. “...just as the testimony of the Anointed One was established in you so that you are not lacking any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revelation of our Lord, Anointed Jesus.” “The testimony of the Anointed One” is the spiritualization of the Torah. The whole duty of humanity consists of Love. This had been established in the readers, and their understanding of that instruction had produced every spiritual gift. These were the relationship attributes that connected with a loving lifestyle. This is what Paul was praising – not that they were able to speak in other languages. However, if anyone wishes to be argumentative, notice that the broader context is their waiting for the Second Coming that took place in AD 70. Both the assessment “you are not lacking” and the temporal statement “just as you wait” applies only to the readers.

Noë’s next question:

Are we to believe that these spiritual gifts were revoked by God despite Paul assuring us: “for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29)?

That’s not what Romans 11 says. Let’s see what he was writing about.

It’s a “certain spiritual (internal) gift” that he has brought up in the letter (ch. 1).

That gift is **justification** without following a **legal code** (ch. 3).

“the free gift from many wanderings is for **justification**.” (ch. 5)

Regarding the legalism of treating the Torah like a code of actions, Paul wrote that

For **death** is the wage of error, but God's free gift is eternal **life** in Anointed Jesus our Lord. (ch. 6)

Therefore when we read in chapter 11 that

Indeed, according to the good message, they are enemies on account of you, but according to the choice they are beloved on account of the ancestors. For the **free gifts** and **God's choice** are **unregrettable things**.

...we realize that the free gifts to which Paul was referring is exactly the same thing he has meant every other time in the letter. God had chosen to offer justification and eternal life through trust – and not through keeping a code. This is something that God does not regret. Romans 11 was not about the miraculous signs at all.

Noë’s next question:

How much of our faith today is still “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20)?

The foundation is still there, but the 21st century interpretation of that foundation is not the foundation. In Paul’s analogy of building construction, the teachings of Jesus through his envoys [Love, relationship

qualities, fulfill the Torah] were the **foundation** – not the entire **building**. The building (all the Christians everywhere) is a replacement for the temple that was about to be destroyed. In the analogy the new building would be completed in time to replace the temple when it was demolished. That is to say, the new temple (comprised of human beings) is accessible and available for worshipping God – now that the old temple is rubble.

Therefore indeed, you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens of the holy ones and members of God's household, which was constructed on the foundation of the envoys and prophets, with Jesus being its corner foundation. On this foundation every building that is firmly joined together is growing in the Lord into a **new holy place**.

The new “holy place” is where worship and sacrifice happen. These things happen in a person’s spirit – not in a physical structure made by human hands.

Noë’s final question:

Are these other spiritual powers and forces still at work today—called “rulers, “authorities,” “powers,” and “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12b)?
If so, why didn’t God withdraw them as well?

Those forces are **not** at work. That passage was about the conflict with the ritual-based philosophy of Priestly Judaism. It was “withdrawn” (removed, destroyed) along with Priestly Judaism itself. The accuser, in this narrative, was the non-Messianic Jew who made verbal assaults against Jesus’ teachings.

Of the remaining things: empower yourselves in Yahweh and in the might of his strength. Put on God's full armor, so you will be able to stand directed at the accuser's system. [non-Messianic human accuser] Because our war is not directed at blood and flesh [we are not going to fight them physically] **but at the rulers, at the authorities, at the kosmic powers of this darkness, at the spiritual things of evil.** [we are to fight them philosophically]

On account of this, take up God's full armor...

having your waist wrapped in truth [the spiritual Torah]...

having put under your feet the preparation of the good message of peace [between Jew and gentile]

In all of this, take up the shield of trust [trust that the temple is coming down], **with which you will be able to quench all of the flaming darts of the evil one.** [the non-Messianic accuser]

And take the helmet of salvation [salvation means rescue from the coming anger] ...

through all prayer and request praying in every season spiritually,
and watching for this [the temple’s destruction] **with all diligence**

I have answered each of John’s objections by pointing toward a more accurate application of every passage that he claimed for support.

John Noë’s “Classic Objections” Examined

After John has asked the questions that we have answered above, he stakes out his position by providing his own answers to fourteen issues that he views as being raised frequently by cessationists. As they apply here, we will respond to those matters that we have not already addressed:

The Big Eight Objections

Objection #1 – to Authenticate the Apostles

John has responded to the authentication argument by citing Jack Deere:

Deere next lays out these two refutations:

First refutation—“No text of Scripture says that the authority of Scripture rests on miracles! In reality, it is just the opposite. Scripture tests miracles” Second refutation—“In reality, only three of the original twelve apostles wrote Scripture—Matthew, John, and Peter. . . . We have authors of Scripture who were not apostles and who never did any recorded miracles! These include Mark, Luke, and Jude The book of Hebrews is even anonymous! . . . then why did Stephen and Philip do signs and wonders? . . . Why did God give gifts of healing and miracles to the church? (1 Cor. 12:7-10, [28]; Gal. 3:5).”

I reply:

The authentication of the message and its prophets, both in the Old Testament and in the New, was not limited to the verification of a specific set of writings. The Torah was God’s instruction to his people, and we must not confuse the instruction itself with the writings that refer to that instruction. God proved to those willing to believe that he had sent Moses. God proved that Moses was teaching them principles that God himself had given to Moses – they were not from himself. God also forecast with signs and wonders a judgment upon specific faithless Israelites.

Unlike what Deere assumes, this is quite different from authenticating the writings of the New Testament. God was proving to all who would listen that the Messianic Jews (Christians) were the ones who had his approval, and that Jesus’ internalization of the Torah was the correct way to understand God’s teachings.

Objection #2 – 1 Corinthians 13

I reply:

As I have already indicated, 1 Corinthians 13 does not predict the “cessation” of the miraculous signs.

Objection #3 – The Evidence Demand

I reply:

A demand for evidence is irrelevant to the discussion. Even if those miraculous signs *were* available today, the supposed acts that we hear about might all be fraudulent. On the other hand, even if there were miracles today, they might not be the signs that are mentioned in the New Testament.

Objection #4 – Only 3 Appearances in Scripture

I reply:

The “signs and wonders” were associated only with the confirmation of the Torah and judgment, and with the confirmation of the Messianic teachings (and judgment on Israel). Other miracles occurred spontaneously and were not associated with any prophecy.

Objection #5 – The ‘Until’ Argument of Ephesians 4:11-13

Again Noë relies on Jack Deere:

Deere rightly recognizes that this passage (see again page 2) is “the only reference in Paul’s writings that I have found that specifically mentions the ‘duration’ of the apostles’ ministry is the ‘until’ of Ephesians 4:13.”

I reply:

The context of the entire open (Ephesian) letter is the conflict with the supporters of Priestly Judaism. The “message of the truth” (ch. 1) and the “armor of God” (ch. 6) are concerned with this distinction and conflict. In ch. 2, “this age” refers to the time while the temple is standing. The Air is the realm of evil spirit beings, and the “sons of unpersuasion” were the Jewish people who rejected their Messiah and who (instead) became advocates of ritual religion. The “age that is coming” refers to the time after the temple is destroyed.

In ch. 4, “to each of us” refers to the inspired envoys and prophets. The “unity of the faith” is the point at which the only true Jews are the Christians. This was Paul’s vision for the time after the temple is destroyed. So when Paul wrote that those miraculous people had been given

“until all of us should reach the point of the unity of the faith and the recognition of God’s son – until we should reach a measure of stature of the fullness of the Anointed One”

he means precisely until that point when the temple is gone. The faith was unified because Priestly Judaism was destroyed, leaving only Christianity – those who lived in “the recognition of God’s son.” Once it was clear that Jesus had been the Anointed One (*the Messiah*); that is, once God destroyed Priestly Judaism, the miracle-workers were no longer necessary. But John follows up with an additional question:

If apostles and prophets ceased, why not evangelists, pastors, and teachers?

A: They did.

John creates a false dichotomy by saying that we cannot bifurcate the list. There isn’t any need to do so. Paul did not write, “He gives the apostles,” or “he keeps on providing prophets.” Paul wrote instead, “he **gave** the envoys, and the prophets, and the good messengers, and the shepherds and teachers.” All of the people about whom Paul was writing were alive at that time and had been given (past tense). The passage does not envision any additional persons being added to that particular group of people. Let’s look at it this way: if you had asked me ten years ago whom God had provided in my personal life for my own edification, I might have written back to you: “He gave my friends, and my mother and father.”

Ten years later both of my parents are dead. I never said he would stop giving me other friends, but I never said anything about other people at all. Similarly, Paul only wrote about *those* people. His focus was on the people of that generation as they lived in the shadow of the upcoming judgment on Israel. The passage never intends to look outside of that scope. Those people are all dead now. Does God keep providing everyone on that list now? No. In fact most of the people that we see now are providing *themselves* as religious figures. This is entirely different from what those words signified then.

Objection #6 – The Things that Mark an Apostle

I reply:

Only people who were personally sent by the risen Jesus to herald the end of the age were his envoys. The context of the heralding is found in Matthew 10 and Matthew 28. That context lasted until the conclusion of the age in AD 70.

Objection #7 – Tongues Were Known Languages

I reply:

The nature of the gift of languages is irrelevant to the issue of whether the Bible provides a temporal framework for the miraculous signs.

Objection #8 – Tongues Were a Sign for Unbelievers and Nothing Else

I reply:

The nature of the gift of languages is irrelevant to the issue of whether the Bible provides a temporal framework for the miraculous signs.

Objection #9 – Addressed to Them Not Us

Notably, everything Jesus and the New Testament writers said and wrote was addressed to them, back then and there. So how many of the other things are we going to toss out based on this same reasoning?

I reply:

“Toss out” everything except for individual, interpersonal relationships. Basically, the moral principles that were present from Adam to Jesus are timeless. Jesus only removed “religion” from them.

...by what text or hermeneutic do we not stop the seeking of the kingdom (Matt. 6:33),...

I reply:

The seeking of the kingdom is individual. People were doing it before Jesus arrived and still do it today. It does not require a dispensation.

doing the works of Jesus (John 14:12),

I reply:

Ceased. That context concerns the Twelve alone.

or obeying the moral requirements today?

The “moral requirement” is the spiritual Torah, consisting of Love and Trust. This has been the same since Adam and has not changed. Only our understanding of that instruction has changed.

Objection #10 – We have Christ, We Don’t Need Anything Else

I reply:

The determination of what is “necessary” is irrelevant to the issue of whether the Bible provides a temporal framework for the miraculous signs. And “we” do not “have Christ” in the sense that the apostles did. That was a miraculous reminder to them of what he had taught them while they were studying with him. It applies to no one today.

Objection #11 – Confined to the ‘Last Days’

Scripture reveals that these gifts and miraculous powers belonged not to the “last days” but to the “age to come.” The writer of Hebrews emphatically speaks of those in the 1st century as being “who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers (*dunamis* – miraculous powers) of the age to come” (Heb. 6:5; also see Eph. 1:21-23; 3:20-21; Rom. 11:29).

I reply:

I have already indicated the proper context of the “free gift” in Romans. Eph 3 only mentions giving glory to God in all ages. Eph 1 mentions Paul’s notion that God gave the Messiah a rulership lasting into the next age. Paul explains that by destroying Priestly Judaism and leaving the readers intact (“saved”), “in the age that is coming upon us, he might show the surpassing wealth of his generosity in kindness toward us in Anointed Jesus.” The action takes place in *that* age, but its effects last into the coming age – the age that began in AD 70.

The language in Hebrews 6 indicates that the author clearly is writing about the readers’ own participation in the miraculous signs. For (s)he expresses this in parallel language

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened,
who once tasted of the heavenly gift and became partakers of holy breath,
and who tasted God's beautiful declaration (and the powers of an age about to come),
and who fell away
to renew again to the point of mental change, since they have crucified God's son anew for themselves
and are making a spectacle of him.”

The “heavenly gift” is “God’s beautiful declaration.” This is the foundational teaching about Jesus’ identity as the Messiah, which the author has just mentioned in 6:1f. The holy breath is a “power of an age about to come.” The wording is unusual, and the structure and local context provide us with little. The author is saying that since the readers have performed miracles, there would be nothing to bring them back to Jesus if they decide to dump him and return to Priestly Judaism. At that point, when the temple is destroyed (ch. 10), they would lose their access to God and would face ultimate destruction.

The miracles were there to usher in a coming age, and it is most likely that the author was only intending to refer once more to the predicament faced by the readers. The miracles that they were then a part of pointed toward the coming age, but all of the action in the passage was taking place in the present age. To say that the author suddenly placed an *aside* into the entire treatise in order to indicate, “oh, by the way, these miracles will continue later,” is an enormous stretch of the imagination designed only to try to prop up a viewpoint of continuance.

Objection #12 – Canon of Scripture

Preterist cessationists deduce that if the gift of prophecy is still operative today, then the canon of Scripture is not closed and new books of the Bible could and should still be being written. But that’s an anathema to them and to most Christians. It’s further

deduced that if the canon of Scripture is closed (to which most Christians agree), then all prophecy must have ceased when all was fulfilled circa A.D. 70.

I reply:

The Bible does not connect inspiration or writings with the miraculous signs. There is a sense to which whatever agrees with the Bible is inspired. There is nothing to the assertion that prophecy ceased with the close of the canon.

Objection #13 – Daniel 9:24 – ‘to Seal Up Vision and Prophecy’

I reply:

I see nothing in Daniel 9 relating to the end of the signs forecasting AD 70.

Objection #14 – What Possible Purpose Could There Be for These Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit Today?

I reply:

Whether or not we could concoct a rationale for providing similar signs today is irrelevant to the issue of whether *those* signs were limited as to time frame, and they were.

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