

## “CONFIRMING THE WORD WITH SIGNS FOLLOWING”

The title for this study comes from a statement recorded by Mark, in Mark 16:20. It is in the context of the great commission given by the Lord. The Lord had just said salvation would be for those who “believe” and are “baptized.” The claim is sometimes made that those who “believe” can cast out devils (demons), or take up serpents without being hurt. To arrive at a proper and consistent understanding of the text, we will begin a background study of the **persons** who would be directly involved in such situations, as to whether or not some of those **persons** are still around, or such **persons** become able to do these things because they “believe” in Jesus, and claim His salvation. We begin by going back to the records of Matthew and John, in their first chapters. The names are given of these **men** (Gr. *aner*, meaning “male”). Their names are given, as they began to follow Jesus in His special discipleship, who were later known as “apostles.” The first time the term “his disciples” is found is in Matt. 5:1. Let’s trace the term along with “twelve”, “disciples”, and “they” and “them” as we observe their discipleship unto Jesus as He ascends into heaven.

In Matt. 16:13, “his disciples” are asked a question about His identity. In verse 20, “his disciples” are charged to not reveal His identity at that point. Mark’s account calls them “his disciples” (Mark 8:27). In Mark 9:1, He said unto “them” that **they** would be the recipients of a special “power” that would be given at the institution of “the kingdom of God.” Then, in verse 35, they are called “the twelve”, one of many many times they are referred to as such in the New Testament. “Twelve” is used often in reference to the “men” He chose to be with Him in His mission on earth. After Judas died, there were only “eleven”, which is occasionally used to describe the men. In Luke 24:33, “the eleven” become the recipients of His appearances after His resurrection. In verse 49, Jesus refers to them as being the ones who had previously received the promise of “power” from on high. He led out to Bethany where He blessed them just before He ascended into heaven. The word “them” describes “the eleven” in verse 50, and again in verse 51, and then the word “they” as they worship the Lord. As He spoke to the eleven, while they “beheld” and Jesus was taken up out of “their” sight (Acts 1:9). “They” looked stedfastly into heaven and are addressed by angels called them “men of Galilee” (v. 10).

The disciples went on to Jerusalem (v. 12) as the Lord had commanded (v. 4). While there Peter pointed out that someone needed to be selected to replace Judas, which would make the number “twelve” complete. As “they” (the men of Galilee who had witnessed the ascension) prayed that one might take part in the “apostleship” (v. 25), “they” then gave forth their lots and it fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered with the “eleven” apostles, meaning then there were “twelve” once again. The very next verse in the New Testament says “they” (meaning the twelve, or eleven plus Matthias), and “they” were sitting in a house, and cloven tongues appeared “them”, v. 3, and “they” were filled with the Holy Spirit as the Lord had promised to the apostles (Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). These men were “Galilaeans” (v. 7; cf Acts 1:11). and not from America. The “men” (v. 13) were present when Peter and “the eleven” were questioned by the Jews on Pentecost.

Now let’s backtrack a little. We have pretty well established that the “twelve” “men from Galilee”, “his disciples” (who are so often called “them” and “they” throughout the New Testament. This research will now help us to better understand Mark 16, as we shall observe that **“the eleven”, “they”** and **“them”** refers to the special ones alluded to

throughout the rest of Mark 16. The singular word “he” is used generally in verse 16 to refer to one who believes and is baptized, but the plural “them” is used five (5) times in the context, following the term “the eleven” (v. 14). The word “their” is also used (v. 14). The pronoun “they” is used a number of times in reference to “saved” individuals, but only two (2) with reference to “the eleven” (a term sometimes used generically to refer TO the entire group of the apostles, as it was for awhile before Matthias was selected). Jesus is addressing “them” (the apostles, v. 15). Remember, Jesus had already upbraided the apostles because they did **not** believe some who first reported that Jesus had been raised from the dead, but **now** they **do believe** (v. 17).

At this point Jesus is foretelling what some will be able to do “following” (v.20) the preaching of the gospel by the “twelve” men of Galilee. There were signs to “follow” the belief of the twelve, or to come about **after** the apostles “believed” now that Jesus had been raised from the dead. These signs that would result would be (1) Casting out devils, (2) Speaking with new tongues, (3) Taking up serpents, (4) Drinking deadly poison without hurt, and (5) Laying hands on the sick for their recovery. Does this refer to any “he” that believeth, or to “the eleven” who now believe? Let’s see if this can be determined from the last two (2) verses in the chapter. Mark begins by using the word “So,” suggesting a conclusion as a result of what had been said in the previous verses. He had spoken unto “them” (who had just witnessed Jesus being “received up into heaven” (v. 19), And “they” (the apostles) went forth doing the preaching that Jesus had just commanded them to do, and the Lord worked with “them”, **confirming the word with signs following** the preaching of the word.

So, whatever “signs” were to be done, were those as the Lord worked with “them”, the apostles, and not done by anyone who also might “believe and are baptized.” Later however, Paul was added to the preaching of the word and the performance of “signs.” We learn that he, Paul, was able to cast control evil spirits (Acts 13), and even to be bitten by a poisonous viper and feel no harm, but the scripture is silent as to when and how the other miraculous things occurred. Certain “signs” were performed by Philip, for instance (Acts 8:13), on whom apostolic hands had been laid (Acts 6:6). It was clear in early days of the church that before any one else other than the apostles, the apostles had to lay their hands on them to enable them to perform signs, but they did not lay hands on everyone that believed, but only to select disciples along the way,

When some were saved in Samaria, the apostles sent Peter down there to lay hands on some to enable them to perform signs. Simon the former sorcerer became a “believer”, but was not able to perform signs, or even to bestow the power upon others. It was declared that apostolic hands could the Holy Spirit be given to enable one to perform signs, and that Simon, a “believer” would have no part in this entire “sign” activity (Acts 8:13-21).

Then, in Hebrews 2, the writer referred to the “salvation” (spoken by the Lord, v. 3; cf Mark 16:16), and which was **confirmed** (from the Greek word *bebaioa*, meaning to make firm or establish) and is the **same word** used by Mark in Mark 16:20. Mark says the Lord worked with the “believers”, while Paul said God bore witness with the men who “heard” Jesus give the information about salvation. The word has been “confirmed” or made strong by the many signs the apostles performed. It “was (past tense) confirmed”, and signs are not necessary to confirm the word over and over again. Once confirmed, always confirmed.

As a matter of fact, the scripture teaches that these miraculous gifts were to **cease** being practiced, and only their record would be preserved (John 20:30-31). In 1 Cor. 12, Paul declared that gifts were not given to everyone who has faith in Jesus, as taught in 1 Cor. 14. The gifts are named in 1 Cor. 12:4-11. Included in this list include many of the things named in Mark 16, such as "healing" and "speaking in tongues." These two gifts are the very ones that so-called Pentecostal and "faith-healing" movements want to hold on to. Yet, the gift of tongues (which is really no more than their having the ability to speak in real languages without having studied them, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. This gift was only possessed by the apostles, and those upon whom they laid their hands, were declared by Paul as "**cease**" or brought to an end when the church reached a state of maturity with the written word being available to all, which would be confirmed by the signs. The signs were like the scaffolds used in the erection of a building, which would be taken down when the building is completely built.

Also included in the list of gifts is that of the gift of "faith" (1 Cor. 12:9). That was not referring to the ability to "believe the word", but to the practicing of miraculous powers in some way. Paul refers to this gift in 1 Cor. 13:2, so as to "remove mountains". This could well be something that would involve "governments" (12:28), and was practiced by some in the local government of the church, such as the elders. Obviously, some elders in the early church were gifted in the manner of "anointing with oil" which would be "in the name (or by the power of the Lord" as HE worked through the miraculous, plus the fact that it was the prayer of "**faith**", alluding to that original gift of faith. There were surely limitations to the use of this gift, or else there would be no sickness in the church or even in the world today, for the gift could wipe out all sickness. Obviously, there was selectivity in the practice of this gift, but no one can deny that it did exist at one time. This gift was not the ability to "believe the gospel", but to something special. Paul said that "faith abideth ever."

In conclusion, none of the special gifts are available today. The claim that they do exist seems it's advocates claim **only** those gifts that can obviously be detected, but the taking up of serpent, and drinking deadly poison are avoided, while all are listed equally by Mark in Mark. We know that some have "tried" the business of "snake handling," but have lost their lives as a result. God's truth today is to be based on the pure teaching of the written word, and not on the performance of so-called miracles. Those who want these gifts to exist and be practiced today, need to realize their their religious profession is in error, since none can have the results that the apostles and those in the next generation of the church had because the apostles had laid hands on them.

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