

SIGNS & WONDERS

**A BIBLICAL REPLY TO THE CLAIMS
OF
MODERN DAY MIRACLE WORKERS**

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Printed in the United States of America

Signs & Wonders is Part of a Trilogy on the Holy Spirit:

Dynamic Power of the Holy Spirit (A Biblical Exposition on
Spiritual Gifts and the Power of the Holy Spirit)

Signs & Wonders (A Biblical Reply to the Claims of Modern Day
Miracle Workers)

The Spiritual Gift of Tongues (A Biblical Response to Modern Day
Tongues)

“Buy Truth, and do not sell it.”

(Proverbs 23:23a)

Are you aware that sound Bible teaching is a precious and a priceless piece of spiritual jewelry? Indeed, Church History has shown how difficult it is to come by, especially in Christianity today! So when God, from His jewel box of grace, exposes us to pearls of Truth in His infallible and inerrant Word, we ought to embrace and cherish them without reserve. Sound Bible teaching and its application are the treasures that hold our capacity to enjoy abundant life, maximum happiness, friendship, marriage, business, and the source of our unprecedented blessing for today, tomorrow and eternity. Therefore my beloved, “buy Truth” [stay rooted in sound Bible teaching], for Truth “... *is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her [it]*” (Proverbs 8:11).

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Acknowledgments

With utmost pleasure, I express my profound gratitude to all who are serving our Savior Jesus Christ and fulfilling the “Great Commission” through Grace Evangelistic Ministries. Your partnership, enduring devotion, and relentless support in every sense of the word are indeed yielding huge dividends to the glory of the Almighty God as we take His message of hope coast to coast and around the world. Simply put, your commitment and passion for the work of His Kingdom is astronomically beyond human computation! Also my endless gratitude goes to God the Father for His grace gesture of salvation and for the indwelling of His Holy Spirit, the Greatest Teacher of all time. To crown my heartfelt gratitude, my standing ovation goes to no other person than to my Master, and best Friend, King of kings, Lord of lords, the Bright Morning Star—my eternal Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His unparalleled sacrifice on the cross two thousand years ago paved the way and made it possible for me—the undeserving one, in every sense of the word—to communicate His infallible Word through this book.

Moses C. Onwubiko

Message Of Hope

The doctrinal teaching in this book cannot benefit you unless you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Good News is: You can trust the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation right now and be eternally saved! Salvation is a free gift! It is the epitome of God's grace! And it is very simple to obtain. It's as easy as ABC! In Acts of the Apostles 16:30b, a man desperate for his eternal destiny asks this urgent question: "Sirs what must I do to be saved?" The Scripture alone gives the answer:

And they [Paul and Silas] said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household [if they would also believe]' (Acts 16:31 NASB).

It's that simple! Faith alone in Christ alone!

Elsewhere the Apostle John proclaimed,

But these [facts including unique miracles that Jesus Christ performed] have been written [recorded] so that you may [have the evidence to] believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [in Christ alone] you will have [eternal] life in His name (John 20:31 NASB).

Later, the same Apostle declared,

'Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ [the Savior] is born of God' (1 John 5:1a NASB).

'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten [uniquely born] Son, that whoever [including you— whoever] believes in Him [will] not perish, but [will] have eternal life" (John 3:16 NASB).

Contrary to public opinion, salvation is not based on morality or good works. It's a free gift (Romans 6:23b). The Apostle Paul vividly stated:

For by **grace** you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the **gift** of God, not as a result of works [i.e. good works], so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB).

It's faith alone in Christ alone! That's grace! That's God's way! The only way! No other way! Believe on Him and be eternally saved. Right now, you may wish to pause and note the message of the Holy Spirit,

For He says, "At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you"; **behold, now is ... 'THE DAY OF SALVATION'** (2 Corinthians 6:2 NASB).

You can receive this great and awesome gift of salvation and be forever saved by simply telling God the Father: "God I am placing my trust entirely on Your Son Jesus Christ as my Savior." The Bible gives the only assurance you need:

'He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son [the command to believe in the Son] will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him' (John 3:36 NASB).

The moment you believe, you will, for the first time, be indwelt and filled with the Holy Spirit!

Fellowship With God

Sin ruptures our fellowship with God and robs us of the filling of the Holy Spirit, the Greatest Teacher of all time. If you are already a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you need to ensure that you are filled with the Holy Spirit, so that He will open your eyes to the Truth communicated herein; so you will come to comprehend and appreciate, “With all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth” of His unchanging Word! In preparation, you may pause, search your soul, and acknowledge all known sins to God the Father.

“If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [unknown or forgotten sins]” (I John 1:9 NASB).

Dear Heavenly Father,

We approach Your throne of grace with an offering of thanksgiving, and petition for all who read this book. We pray that its doctrinal content will be a tremendous source of blessing. We humbly ask that You will use the power of Your Truth, as put forth here, to loosen the shackles of those who have been kept in bondage by falsehood for so long. Father, “Sanctify [us] in the Truth, Your word is Truth.”

We ask that You may revive us in Your Truth; may the impact of Your infallible Word reverberate and reign supreme in our souls. May the world feel its impact resulting in maximum glorification of Your Holy name. We lift our prayer in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chapter One

Introduction

And you will know the Truth, and the Truth will make you free (John 8:32 NASB).

In the year 2005, I had the privilege of communicating the doctrine relevant to speaking in tongues and miracles, signs and wonders to a group of pastors and church workers in Nigeria, West Africa. Many in attendance were charismatic ministers. About 1,000 vibrating pastors sat before me when I first introduced the lesson. Many knew the ministry and its doctrinal position on this subject. Literally, I had to appeal for calm. Thereafter, the Holy Spirit took center stage of the conference and threw a beam of light on this controversial subject. He opened their eyes to the unchanging Word of God in such a way they had little or no basis to argue or resist the Truth so clearly delineated! At the end of the five day conference, many were liberated from their error! Some of these came to us with this heartbreaking question: “Now that we know the Truth, where do we go from here? We know that our superiors in our various denominations will not go along with us if we start teaching this Truth.” Others came to me, and literally begged that I compile this teaching into book form so that everyone could have an opportunity to be exposed to the Truth of the Scripture! The Holy Spirit left no doubt about what had to be done.

We live in one of the most interesting times of human history, a time when Satan, the enemy of the Cross, has blindfolded and enslaved an untold number of believers in his camp of falsehood. In his ingenuity, he continues to devise and reinvent subtle ways to keep believers in bondage, distracted from the Truth, for this Truth would set them free to glorify God. Satan is the sponsor of modern day tongues and the miracles, signs and wonders movement.

Are you thinking, “You must be out of your mind to make such a dogmatic assertion.” You are not alone! I hear the same comment wherever and whenever I have the privilege to shed light on this

subject. But in the end thousands who initially objected, have now become my friends in the Truth! That's the greatest reward! And it's my prayer that when you finish this study that we too will be good friends in Truth.

We must set the record straight. God still performs miracles; but Satan does too! We absolutely do not dispute the miraculous works of God that we experience or witness moment by moment. They are indisputable! However, we are setting the course to demonstrate that God no longer appoints special individuals to perform these works. In the past He appointed men as the means through which He manifested His power to the world. Though we are aware of the miracle filled ministries of Elijah and Elisha in the books of Kings, our study will focus on Moses, Jesus Christ (the God-Man) and the Apostles.

These men were given supernatural power by God, to perform miracles at will, wherever and whenever they chose to do so. This power was given for a specific period of time, for a specific reason. God in His grace always honored their pronouncements. We can infer that this ability to command a miracle at will was a *God given badge of distinction* that set these chosen men apart from others, so that those who saw or heard would respect their work and heed their message, so everyone would recognize them as God's messengers. This is the whole concept of the *miracle-sign-badge*; it's simply to validate the message! It's God's endorsement of these men that they are His chosen agents. This is clear from the dialogue the Lord had with Moses from the burning bush.

Then Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?" (Exodus 4:1 NIV).

You see, Moses was concerned about how he would be received. Moses had no illusion about his encounter. He knew that it was the Lord. But how could he convince those who had never before heard God's voice? Everything known about God by the Jews in Egyptian slavery, they knew from tradition passed down to them by their spiritual leaders, the Patriarchs. Literally Moses asked the Lord for a BADGE. How did God respond? He gave Moses the equivalent of a "five-star general badge." (See chapter 2.)

In the course of our study, we shall examine **three unique Ages**; three Eras in which this **sign-badge** was used extensively and exclusively to demonstrate that the badge bearers were sent by God. These Ages include the Jewish Age, the Age of Jesus Christ, the God-Man (Hypostatic Union) and the Church Age. God dramatically opened each Era with an *unprecedented miraculous display authenticating His special ambassadors*.

We will examine each Era as we progress. It will benefit you to pay close attention to these Eras, for they hold the Truth about our subject! Miracles, signs and wonders are nothing but a badge of recognition; and so we shall use the word badge when we refer to miracles, signs and wonders.

This special badge of recognition and the spectacular acts associated with it did not escape the attention of Satan; that the sign-badge was meant exclusively for those sent by God, does not deter him. Satan's original sin of arrogance is now more polished than ever! He has always dreamed of being like the Most High God. And though he cannot succeed, his plan is in full gear to counterfeit whatever God does including a counterfeit sign-badge. No problem for the prince of darkness. If that is what it takes to make a false message believable, he will flood the Lord's church with his counterfeit-badges. And he has!

This was a major concern to the Apostle Paul when he received the report about counterfeit Apostles and teachers at the church in Corinth.

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve (2 Corinthians 11:3, 12-15 NIV).

We should note the Apostle's concern because it should also be ours: *"But I am afraid, that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."*

My friend, stay with me as we examine this crucial doctrine. Are you a victim of falsehood? Has your mind been led astray from the Truth? Are you a member of the "modern day miracles, signs and wonders club?" Have you taken two or three verses of Scripture out of context and used them to form a band of healers? Do you have a healing ministry? Do you consider yourself one with the gift of healing? If you think that you have a sign-badge, from whence does it originate? ... God? ... or Satan?

"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

It's my prayer that God will enlighten you and cause you to swim with joy in the pool of the infinite riches of His sound Bible teaching as we dive into His Word together.

ERA ONE: The Jewish Age

*The Time from Abraham (1,800 B.C.) to
the Day of Pentecost (34 A.D.)*

God and The Jewish Age

The Jewish Age was conceived by God in eternity past and put into action when Sarah, Abraham's wife, became pregnant at age 90 with a son whose name was Isaac. It was nurtured in the womb of Egypt when Jacob's sons, Isaac's grandchildren, moved there. It was born to a full blown nation when God liberated the Jews, the Hebrew slaves, from their bondage in Egypt and consecrated them on Mount Sinai. This is unique and unprecedented. There had never been a time in human history when God called out a nation unto Himself. This is noted in Scripture:

For you [Jewish people] are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob] that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; **he is the faithful God**, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands (Deuteronomy 7:6-9 NIV).

This distinctive Age can be traced back to God's call and promise to Abraham (who was called Abram before he trusted God), a man who found favor in His sight. This we know from Scripture,

[Now the LORD said to Abram], ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’ So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot, went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai [Sarai became Sarah when she conceived Isaac], his nephew Lot, and all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there (Genesis 12:1-5 NIV).

The stage was set. Abraham obeyed God; now God was under obligation to fulfill His promise. But his wife, Sarai (Sarah), was barren, and now way past her menopause. The situation seemed very grim, but not for God. He is always faithful to His Word. His promise to Abraham was fulfilled when God gave him a son at age 100.¹ But one son is a long way from the promise of making an entire nation through Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). That is God’s way, one step at a time. A familiar Chinese proverb expresses God’s way of doing things: *A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.* Abraham had a son Isaac; Isaac had a son named Jacob. Now Jacob had twelve sons, and those sons moved to Egypt where they had families and increased in number. The potential to become a nation was born.

Many years had passed since God made the promise to Abraham. Some even thought that God had forgotten, or was incapable of fulfilling His promise. Not so!

Humanly speaking, who would ever think that 400 years later God’s promise to make a nation through Abraham would still be fulfilled? Talk about God’s faithfulness! Four hundred years later, a banner of God’s faithfulness was raised in Sinai. The Jewish people became a sovereign nation (Exodus 12:40). God keeps His Word! What a comfort for us to know that:

¹Moses C. Onwubiko, *Joseph, A Pillar of Grace*

For a thousand years in Your [God's] sight are like yesterday when it passes by (Psalm 90:4a NASB).

Sun, rain, or snow, His promises would be fulfilled in total! Circumstances, favorable or unfavorable, are inconsequential to God's faithfulness! Yes, 400 years later, His promise to Abraham was made good. This brings us to the remarkable incident that prepared the way for the Jews' deliverance from their slavery.

We need to focus our attention on this lesson, for we are about to establish the foundation on which we will build our entire study, one brick at a time. On this foundation, we shall examine miracles, signs and wonders and their purpose in God's plan. Truly understanding this segment of our study will clarify the issue of today's miracle workers.

We should always remember that every creative work of God is, in itself, a miracle. Nonetheless, we want to carefully note what happened in Genesis at the burning bush and throughout the book of Exodus, for therein lie the lessons of miracles, signs and wonders.

Let's examine three major reasons for miracles, signs and wonders.

1. To reveal Himself.

God has an integrated system whereby He makes known His sovereign, omnipotent power to the world. Miracles, signs and wonders are a part of this. No thinking person can observe closely the systematic structure and design of the universe, the galaxies, man, and everything therein and still reject the concept of a Supreme Being—except he be a fool as the Scripture claims:

The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God' (Psalm 14:1a NASB).

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the works of His hands (Psalm 19:1 NASB).

O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth, Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens! (Psalm 8:1 NASB).

The Apostle Paul argues that atheists are atheists because they purposely suppress the Truth within themselves of the existence of a Supreme Being. He affirms,

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men [including evolutionists/atheists] who suppress the Truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them [through the firmament of His handiwork]. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God [they knew that the supreme design of the universe must call for a Supreme Being], they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:18-22 NIV).

God clearly reveals Himself to man. Signs, miracles and wonders were a special part of this revelation.

2. To create a reference.

Great are the works of the LORD; they are studied by all who delight in them. Splendid and majestic is His work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate. He has given food to those who fear him; He will remember His covenant forever (Psalm 111:2-5 NASB).

Moment-by-moment God exposes us to His miraculous power so believers will have grounds to increase their confidence in Him. We can assure ourselves of His providential care when we are plagued with problems that have no apparent solutions. In other words, when we, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, are face-to-face with a hopeless situation, (like the no water situation of the Jews in the

wilderness), we can take an inventory of how God has previously worked miracles in our lives. Personal knowledge of His goodness to us assures us of His care! Above all, His infallible Word is the solid basis for our assurance.

You might pause and reason: If God created this universe, and He did; if God parted the Red Sea for the Jews to cross on dry land, and He did; if God raised His Son from the dead, and He certainly did; if God has brought me this far in life, and He has; then my problem is very small in His sight. The Apostle Paul says it best:

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all [He has done the MOST], how will He not also with Him freely give us all things [down to the smallest detail]? (Romans 8:32 NASB).

He knows when and how to solve our smallest problem. After all, our problems are not bigger than the universe which hangs on nothing but His power! In the final analysis, we relax, examine our predicament and realize:

‘With men this is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God[!]’ (Mark 10:27b NIV).

God’s primary purpose in displaying His power in Egypt, besides the liberation of the Jews, was to provide a reference for His chosen people and all the world to see. Later, His miraculous work in the wilderness was used as a basis for judging them at Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 13-14). They had forgotten all the wondrous works of God, but complained about the giants in the land of Canaan.

Giants? What are giants in respect to the parting of the Red Sea? What are giants in respect to the raining of manna from heaven? Or the provision of water from a rock? These people panicked! They complained! They failed to think or reason. They should have remembered all that God had done for them as a reference. If God had seen them through all their ordeals from Egypt to the wilderness, and He had, then equally He would be able to take care of these giants for them.

We should place our trust in Him.

That's exactly what Joshua and Caleb did! Out of the 12 spies sent in to the land they were the only two who placed their trust completely in God! (Numbers 13:30). The rest of the spies from the sons of Israel did the opposite, and suffered the consequences of their distrust at Kadesh-barnea. We can read their judgment in Numbers 14:1-45. God wanted to remove these rebellious people and start over with Moses.

The LORD said to Moses, 'How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them? I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they' (Numbers 14:11-12 NIV).

What a tragedy. Moses intervened with God for the Jews and He postponed judgment on them (Numbers 14:13-17), though God disciplined them severely.

You and I ought not to forget Kadesh-barnea when we are face-to-face with a dilemma—no matter how overwhelming! We must return to the reference of God's faithfulness.

3. To authenticate His messengers.

This authentication is the heart of our study. Modern day miracle workers seem to have either ignored the Biblical teaching on the concept of miracles, signs and wonders as a sign-badge, or they simply don't know what the Bible really teaches. God had never left His elite servants without giving them a sign-badge. Absolutely not! They had a special task and therefore were equipped with special tools. But not every servant of God is so called. No two people are alike in His service. We are each assigned different tasks suited to our own personality and station in life. The question is not did we accomplish great things for God—but rather did we accomplish the task He assigned to us—no matter how large or small it may appear.

The burning bush account is where the Lord first met with Moses. God called him out and set him apart to be an elite servant He would use to deliver His people, Israel, from their bondage in Egypt.

The LORD said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.’ (Exodus 3:7-10 NIV)

God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, “The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.” This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, “The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.”’ (Exodus 3:15-17 NIV).

Moses knew that He would have a hard time making the Israelites believe that the Lord appeared to him. He knew that it would be difficult to convince them that he was God’s chosen servant, a messenger sent by God to lead their deliverance. So Moses asked God for a sign or a badge that would, without question, authenticate his claim. This we know from Moses question:

‘What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, “The LORD did not appear to you”?’ Then the LORD said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ ‘A staff’ he replied. The LORD said, ‘Throw it on the ground.’ Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the

LORD said to him, ‘Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.’ So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. ‘This **[unique sign-badge]**,’ said the LORD, ‘is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you.’ Then the LORD said, ‘Put your hand inside your cloak.’ So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow. ‘Now put it back into your cloak,’ he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh. Then the LORD said, ‘If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first **miraculous sign [badge]** they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these **two signs** or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground. (Exodus 4:1-9 NIV).

This sign badge, of miracles, signs and wonders, was given not only to Moses, but also to Jesus Christ in the God-Man Age and to the Twelve Apostles in the Church Age as we see from the following scriptures:

Of Jesus Christ Luke tells us:

‘Men of Israel, listen to this: **Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs**, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him’ (Acts 2:22-24 NIV).

Of the Apostles’ sign-badge we read:

For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him [i.e. the Apostles]. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles (Hebrews 2:2-4a NIV).

God authenticated the Apostolic message with a sign-badge! We read from Scripture:

And many **wonders and signs were taking place through the Apostles** (Acts 2:43b NASB).

Elsewhere we read:

And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people. The people held them in high esteem [because of their sign-badge] (Acts 5:12a, 14b cf. 14:3 NASB).

We have identified the three eras and their point men. Moses in the Jewish Age, Jesus Christ, the God-Man in the unique Age of the hypostatic union, and the Apostles in the Church Age. Each had a sign-badge of recognition. We shall study each category and their badges.

Moses and the Burning Bush

God uses prepared people and Moses was prepared! He had the best possible education and training while growing up in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh's son.

By faith [means of Truth in his soul passed down to him by tradition] Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:24-27 NIV).

When Moses left Egypt he married Jethro's daughter. While Moses was attending Jethro's flock he had a personal encounter with Yahweh (the Hebrew word for God) and developed a personal love and confidence in Him. This we know from the book of Hebrews:

Now Moses, [after fleeing Egypt], was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, **'I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.'** When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' And Moses said, 'Here I am.' 'Do not come any closer,' God said. 'Take off your sandals, for the

place where you are standing is holy ground.’ Then he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.’ At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God (Exodus 3:1-6 NIV).

God knew that Moses’ future assignment would be no ordinary task and so met him in an extraordinary way. For Moses to see a burning bush in which **“the bush [itself] does not burn up”** was more than an extraordinary sight—it was a miracle! The site, *“the mountain of God,”* a *“holy ground”* was a mountain of quick training for Moses. God used this meeting place to reveal Himself to Moses.

Picture this: A burning bush in which the bush does not burn up. The Angel of the Lord in the flames of fire [in the same] bush. What a scene! This is the closest fellowship with God anyone has ever had apart from the time the Lord and two angels met face to face with Abraham.

The incident alone was enough to reveal a Supreme Being to Moses, but that’s not all! God spoke to him! *“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”* Moses had heard about the God of his forefathers, but had never heard His voice. He had known of His power, but not directly!

The burning bush served two purposes.

1. **It was a teaching aid for Moses;** a display of the majestic power of God.
2. **The fire stood for judgment.** God was about to judge Egypt for their enslavement of the Jews. The Scripture tells us that God spoke to Moses and said:

‘I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the

Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians” ’ (Exodus 6:2-8; cf. Genesis 15:13-14 NIV).

You read it correctly! He will redeem them “*with mighty acts of judgment.*” Fire in Scripture often symbolizes God’s judgment, as shown in Isaiah:

See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD” (Isaiah 66:15-16; cf. 10:17; 30:27, 33; Matthew 3:12 NIV).

When we study the Church Age we will take a look at another fire incident. It occurred on the day of Pentecost when the new Era, the Church Age, was born. These two incidents, the burning bush, of Moses in the Jewish Age, and tongues as “*tongues as of fire*” at Pentecost, to open the Church Age (Acts 2:3), were never again duplicated in history.

We recall that no two servants are alike; and no two servants are equipped, commissioned and used the same way. God made Moses a unique individual and used him in a unique manner. God gave him a sign-badge that was never duplicated throughout Jewish history. God used him to perform miracles, signs and wonders like no other in his time. God set him apart and caused the Jews to revere his leadership and heed his message. On one occasion God used Moses to part the Red Sea just long enough to provide safe passage for the Israelites but caused the Egyptian armies to be drowned. We know this from the Scripture,

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the

entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant (Exodus 14:27-31 NIV).

“And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.” No one had ever seen anything like this before! Never! God used this miracle, and others through the hand of Moses, to authenticate that Moses was truly His messenger. This miracle-sign-badge was necessary because a new Era had been introduced. This new Era needed a foundation and superstructure to function. The law would be given to guide them; but until then, the people would have to listen to and follow Moses. God knew these Israelites would not listen to Moses unless God decorated him with the equivalent of a “Five-Star General miracle-sign-badge.” And He did!

Once the foundation of the Jewish Age was laid, Moses’ sign-badge was no longer necessary. God had already established His sovereign power among His people through Moses. The Torah, the five books of Moses, had now been written and widely accepted as God’s Word. Therefore it was no longer necessary for God to use miracles, signs and wonders whenever and wherever He communicated to His people. The Torah was completed; the sign-badge ended. This was evident at the end of Moses’ ministry.

The End of Moses’ Ministry and the Call of Joshua

At the end of Moses’ ministry, God chose another servant without the burning bush experience, and without a sign-badge. God did not transfer Moses’ sign-badge to Joshua. Why not? The answer is very simple. Miracles, signs and wonders had served their purpose in God’s program for the Jewish nation. This does not mean that God ceased to perform miracles in the land. He still dried up the

Jordan River, collapsed the walls of Jericho and performed many more miracles. However, the emphasis in this transitional change is no longer on the sign-badge. Understanding the transition between Moses and Joshua and the changes that took place is very important to our study. It will benefit us to read the entire first chapter of the book of Joshua:

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them —to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates —all the Hittite country—to the Great Sea on the west. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. 'Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.' So Joshua ordered the officers of the people: 'Go through the camp and tell the people, "Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the LORD your God is giving you for your own." ' But to the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, 'Remember the command that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you: "The LORD your God is giving you rest and has granted you this land.' Your wives, your children and your livestock may

stay in the land that Moses gave you east of the Jordan, but all your fighting men, fully armed, must cross over ahead of your brothers. You are to help your brothers until the LORD gives them rest, as he has done for you, and until they too have taken possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. After that, you may go back and occupy your own land, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you east of the Jordan toward the sunrise.’ Then they answered Joshua, ‘Whatever you have commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us we will go. Just as we fully obeyed Moses, so we will obey you. Only may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. Whoever rebels against your word and does not obey your words, whatever you may command them, will be put to death. Only be strong and courageous!’ (Joshua 1:1-18 NIV).

In brief, the book of Joshua can be divided into three segments:

- God’s call, charge and promise to Joshua
- Joshua’s response to his commission
- The elders’ response

1. God called Joshua.

Joshua was called to step up and take leadership of the Jews. God reiterated to him the same promise He had made to Moses—a promise to give the Jews a better future—He promised never to forsake Joshua and gave him a charge:

‘... Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful’ (Joshua 1:7-8 NIV).

With Moses the emphasis had been signs, miracles and wonders but with Joshua the emphasis was on the written Word!

2. Joshua responded to the charge.

He knew that his assignment was not an ordinary one; but he relied solely on God's Word for its execution. Joshua did not demand a sign-badge as Moses had done at the burning bush. There was no miracle turning a rod into a snake. A sign-badge was not necessary to carry on where Moses left off. Since the Torah (first 5 books of the Bible) were then in writing, miracles signs and wonders were laid aside. Joshua simply went to work as shown in verses 10-15 where he charged the elders with their duty.

Those who claim that "miracles, signs and wonders" are necessary to carry on the work where the Apostles left off should take note.

3. The elders' response.

The people didn't demand any sign as evidence that Joshua was God's chosen man for the hour. They simply accepted him as God's servant. Why? They had seen the amazing authenticating **sign-miracles** performed by Moses! The people were present when Moses laid his hand on Joshua transferring authority to him (Deuteronomy 34:9). They also had the Word of God, the Torah, to direct and guide them.

They needed no other miracles to convince them of God's workings in their midst. They simply consulted the written Word and believed God.

We should meditate on this.

ERA TWO: The Age of Jesus Christ, the God-Man

The Time of the Life of Christ (4 B.C. to 30 A.D.)

The Messiah & His Miracle-Sign-Badge

No one knows with certainty how long man has been on the planet earth. Some suggest that the earth is about 7,000 years old and used mathematical deductions to trace the time line of Adam and his descendants through history. Assuming the earth to be 7,000 years old, it took almost 5,000 years for God to fulfill a promise He made to both Adam and Eve concerning a Savior. Amazingly it was after their sin, that God announced,

‘And I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he [Jesus Christ] will crush your head, and you will strike his heel’ (Genesis 3:15 NIV).

God, in His grace, rendered judgment on Adam and Eve. At the same time God in His Grace promised a Savior, not only to Adam and Eve, but for the entire world. They both clearly understood the Gospel message that the Lord gave, and were looking forward to the fulfillment of His promise. When Adam and Eve had their first child Cain, they thought he was the promised offspring, the Messiah. We see this from Eve’s exclamation, “*I have gotten a manchild [the Lord] with the help of the Lord!*” (Genesis 4:1b). Her hopes were dashed when Cain murdered his brother, Abel. When she had another child, Seth, she again thought he must be the Savior. “*For she said, ‘God has appointed me an offspring [seed]’*” (Genesis 4:25b). She was wrong again! The anticipation continued in each generation until the virgin birth.

How would this unique Son be recognized? The lineage through Abraham was finally revealed when God called him: “*And in you [Abraham] all the families of the earth will be blessed.*” (Genesis 12:3b). The Apostle Paul alluded to God’s choice:

Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ (Galatians 3:15-16 NIV).

The birth of Isaac to Abraham was just the first in a chain of events leading to the birth of the promised Son, the Messiah. But that’s a long way ahead. When Isaac’s son, Jacob, and his children moved to Egypt, they too were looking forward to the Messiah. Jacob’s prophecy narrowed the promise to the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10). About 400 years later God pointed to the house of King David (2 Samuel 7:16). In spite of all this, there was not enough information given anywhere in Scripture to enable the Jews to identify the Savior once He was born. Not until a unique sign was finally given to the Jews by the Prophet Isaiah:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you **a sign**: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14 NIV).

The sign would be a *virgin conception*—a sign-miracle! This virgin conception did occur, fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham. It came to pass about 700 years after Isaiah’s prophecy which was about 2,000 years after God had made the “Seed” promise to Abraham! But again, time is nothing to God. God keeps His Word! Jesus said:

‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away’ (Mark 13:31 NASB).

A Savior was born, but only a handful of people were aware of His arrival into the world. Jesus Christ, though from the line of David as promised, was not born a king. His parents were poor in every sense of the word. The Jews were not expecting their Messiah-King to be born in a manger, a lowly feeding trough. Nor were they expecting Him to be born into a carpenter’s household, but He was. They were expecting their King to emerge in royal style. They were

expecting Him to surface with vigor and from a royal family—from a palace! Were they surprised! We would have been too.

The question then was: How would God identify the Savior? To set Him apart, God gave Him the highest miracle-sign-badge mankind has ever known or seen! But before then, John the Baptist was charged with preparing the way.

John the Baptist Announces God's Kingdom

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.' This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him"' (Matthew 3:1-3 NASB).

John the Baptist came on the scene when the Jews had reached their spiritual bottom and God had quit communicating to them—prophesies, visions and spiritual dreams had come to a complete halt. Malachi was the last prophet that God used to indict the Jews, and after that, God was silent for more than 400 years. Yes, for 400 years, there was no “thus says the Lord” until the arrival of John the Baptist! Can God be silent? Yes He can! He can be silent for any length of time He desires. That's His prerogative! He knows when to speak and when to be silent. Today He is silent.²

John the Baptist broke the 400 year silence when God sent him to alert the Jews that the Messiah was among them (Matthew 3:11), but John was yet to identify Him. John also baptized with water because he too needed a sign to identify the Savior.

The next day, he [John] saw Jesus coming to him, and said, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29 NASB).

I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel. Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him,

²Moses C. Onwubiko, *The Spiritual Gift of Tongues*

except that the one [God] who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God” (John 1:31-34; cf. Matthew 3:23-27 NIV).

John the Baptist identified the Messiah, and directed the attention of his disciples to Jesus. (John 1:35-37). John’s ministry began to dwindle as he later asserted,

‘He must increase, but I must decrease’ (John 3:30 NASB).

John’s ministry eventually diminished until it ended entirely! His task was over. Messiah identified! Mission accomplished.

Jesus Christ, the God-Man and His Messianic Sign-Badge

A new Age has begun—the unique era called the *Hypostatic Union* (*Union of the divine nature of God and the human nature of Jesus*)—the Age of Jesus Christ the God-Man. God’s objective was crystal clear: To demonstrate beyond a shadow of doubt that the first born of the virgin Mary was the promised ‘Seed’, the Messiah. What then would be the best way for God to convince the world that the “Seed” of the virgin birth is indeed the promised Messiah? Scripture has the answer: God would authenticate the Messiah’s claim with miracles, signs and wonders as recorded in the book of Isaiah:

Say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; your God [the Messiah] will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.’ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert (Isaiah 35:4-6 NIV).

What Isaiah recorded in the above three verses were unique, specific sign-miracles that would set the Messiah apart from the entire human race.

The Lord used His Messianic miracle-sign-badge to perform these exact miracles described in Isaiah. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in Isaiah, and used this to prove to John the Baptist that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. His all-wise response given to John's messengers has been recorded in Scripture for our benefit. The exchange of words between the two read:

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. When John [the Baptist] heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one [the Messiah] who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk [as Isaiah prophesied concerning Me], those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor' (Matthew 11:1-5 NIV).

Just as a police officer shows his badge, so our Lord showed His sign-badge to John the Baptist in response to his question. His Messianic miracle-sign-badge as recorded in the book of Isaiah was evidence of His Messiahship. Here is the inscription on His badge: *"[When Messiah comes, then] Will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer."*

My friend, these are specific unique miracles. NO ONE had ever performed them prior to the Messiah's appearance; therefore they gave positive identification of the Messiah to John the Baptist.

John the Apostle reaffirms the uniqueness of the blind receiving their sight as per Isaiah's prophecy in his Gospel about the Messiahship of Christ, when he stated:

'Nobody has ever heard of [anyone] opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing' (John 9:32-33 NIV).

The Apostle John clearly states the entire reason for his Gospel. He tells us

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:30-31 NIV).

The Apostle John carefully selected seven unique miracles of Jesus for his Gospel. These he used to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah:

1. Turning water into wine (John 2)
2. Healing of the noble man's son (John 4)
3. Healing the lame (John 5)
4. Feeding of five thousand men with five loaves and two fish (John 6)
5. Walking on water (John 6)
6. Healing the man born blind (John 9)
7. Raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11)

John chose these seven miracles to prove, beyond doubt, that Jesus is the Christ—the Messiah, so that you and I would have a Biblical ground to trust Him as the only Savior.

What is the purpose of the sign-miracles performed by Jesus in John's gospel? Is it to alleviate human suffering? No! Is it to alleviate sickness? No again! Though these miracles accomplished both, the **real purpose** is simply **to authenticate that Jesus is the Christ**. There can be no guesswork! It's the central Truth of Scripture!

But these are written [as evidence] that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31 NIV).

The Apostle Peter's assertions on the day of Pentecost further emphasize John's dissertation. In light of this, Luke quoted the Apostle Peter saying:

'Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited [authenticated] by God to you by [Messianic] miracles, wonders and signs [a badge], which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know' (Acts 2:22 NIV).

Read it again. That's right. God used a Messianic miracle sign-bad-
ge to authenticate that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God.

Question: What's the purpose of miracles, signs and wonders in the Lord's ministry?

So that He would have a successful ministry? Dead wrong!

So that He would pull a crowd? Wrong again!

The answer in one word, AUTHENTICATION!

No wonder our Lord in His defense before the religious crowd of His day had this to say:

Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me [authenticate My Messianic claim]' (John 10:25 NIV).

'But the testimony [Messianic sign-bad-ge] which I have is greater than the testimony of John [the Baptist who never had a badge]; for the [miraculous] works which the Father has given Me [the power] to accomplish, the very works that I do, [authenticate or] testify about Me [according to Isaiah 35:4-6], that the Father has sent Me' (John 5:36 cf. 4:48; 6:14 NASB).

Our Lord's unique miracle-sign-bad-ge thoroughly explained why Nicodemus, one of the great teachers of the Law, came to Jesus:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him' (John 3:1-2 NIV).

You read it correctly! "*For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.*" Thank God that He left no doubt in authenticating His Son! My beloved, we can be assured that Jesus is the Christ, the uniquely born One! Scripture has proved it!

The purpose of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ (God becoming man) was strictly to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

- He knew He would offer Himself as a sacrifice for the lost (John 15:13 NASB).
- He knew that the Cross was unavoidable (Luke 22:42).
- He knew He would return to heaven after His mission (John 17:11).
- He knew that a different age, the Church Age, would be initiated (Matthew 16:18).
- He knew that He had covered only a small territory in evangelism.
- He knew that a greater work of evangelization still loomed ahead.
- He knew that the foundation and the structure of the church would have to be laid (Ephesians 2:20) so that others would be privileged to build upon it (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Jesus Christ chose His twelve disciples, the main representatives, so they could be instrumental in laying the foundation of the church. Now we are ready for a doctrinal insight into the start of the Church and the Twelve, our Lord's elite ambassadors.

ERA THREE: The Church Age

*Pre-canon Period - Prior to completion of the
New Testament (Pentecost to 96 A.D.)*

The Church Age and Its Apostles

‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock [of your testimony concerning Me] **I will build my church** [future], and the gates of Hades will not overcome it’ (Matthew 16:15-18 NIV).

I no longer call you [apostles] servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name (John 15:15-16 NIV).

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the [unbelieving] Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me [with an authentication of a Messianic miracle-sign-badge], I am [equally] sending you [with an authentication of apostolic miracle-sign-badge].’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:19-22 NIV).

We begin this chapter with amazement. It’s exciting to see how God opened each of the three Ages with an unprecedented miraculous event. As we discussed previously, the Jewish Age opened

with the burning bush and the assignment of a miracle-sign-badge to Moses. We saw how God set him apart from the entire Jewish community (Numbers 12:6-8). Likewise, the Age of the presentation of Jesus Christ (Hypostatic Union) began with a dramatic event, the virgin birth. God the Father gave Jesus a Messianic miracle-sign-badge that caused Him to stand out from the entire human race.

What about the opening of the Church Age? It was equally sensational. It opened with a bang—a loud noise-like a rushing wind. A plume as of fire like a tongue, rested on each Apostle and they spoke in tongues—these were part of their apostolic miracle-sign-badges! This was the opening ceremony of Pentecost, the beginning of a new chapter, a new era, the Church Age. We shall elaborate on this as our study progresses, but first we need to take note of what happened to the forerunners of the Church.

As we studied, when Moses went to be with the Lord, his non-transferable badge was laid to rest, for it had served its purpose. It was not transferred to Joshua. Why? Because God had used Moses to lay the foundation for the Jewish Age. Once God has laid a foundation, it stands! God had done everything to reveal Himself to the Jews. He accomplished this through His servant, Moses, by means of signs and wonders. The display of God's mighty work through Moses ranged from the ten miracles in Egypt to the parting of the Red Sea, providing water from a rock, raining of manna from Heaven and His continued presence with them as a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. Many more manifestations of His power were already on record! The Torah was now complete and widely accepted as God's word.

Just as Moses sign-badge was buried with him so it was when the Apostles died. Their Apostolic badges were buried once and for all! They were buried, never to be exhumed or transferred to anyone! They have served their purpose! The foundation of the Church had been laid (Ephesians 2:20). As for the issue of modern day miracles, signs and wonders, we can hardly wait to uncover the Truth in Scripture! We begin with the birth of the Church Age.

Introducing The Church Age

Just as the Jewish Age was unique so is the Church!³ God's perfect Justice had indicted the Jews for their spiritual failures as

³Moses C. Onwubiko, *The Spiritual Gift of Tongues*

seen throughout the Old Testament. Their failure to acknowledge and follow God contributed to 400 years of silence from Him during the period from Malachi to John the Baptist. The book of Malachi is a monument to their final indictment prior to our Lord's Incarnation. Their situation was so dire that when Christ came He wept and lamented over Jerusalem. Matthew recorded His lamentation:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say [in the Millennium], 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord' (Matthew 23:37-39 NIV).

Luke added,

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days [70 A.D.] will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you' (Luke 19:41-44 NIV).

The Jewish spiritual condition broke our Lord's heart to the point that He literally wept. As God, He knew that the end of their time as His priest nation was just around the corner. He knew that a new chapter, a new Age, the Church Age with an entirely new program, would be called in to serve the plan of God. Because our Lord was a Man of compassion, He was moved to tears knowing what would happen to them in 70 A.D., when Judah, and its capital Jerusalem and the magnificent Temple would be reduced to rubble. We are not concentrating on Jewish failures and judgment but drawing our attention to our Lord's prophetic utterance concerning the nation. This will prepare us to reflect on the event of Pentecost.

Pentecost—the Birthday of the Church

Pentecost marks the birthday of the Church. Scholars have varying opinions as to when the Church actually began. To answer this we must first define “the Church.” The Bible clearly tells us the body of Christ is the Church.

... for the sake of his body, which is the church (Colossians 1:24c NIV).

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:27 NIV).

By what means was the Body of Christ formed? Let’s consult Scripture here too.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body [the Church]—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:13 NIV).

This Church Age privilege of being placed into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, at the moment of salvation, is generally known as the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” This occurred for the first time on the Jewish feast of Pentecost. The Lord Himself hinted at this Truth as Luke recorded:

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit [baptism of the Holy Spirit]” (Acts 1:4-5 NASB).

In the next chapter of Acts, we can clearly see that the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” initiated the Church on the day of Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house

where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them (Acts 2:1-3 NASB).

Besides all the spectacular things that happened on the day of Pentecost, there's one thing that seems to elude our attention, that's "*the tongues as of fire*" (Acts 2:3). We have already taught that reference to fire in Scripture often symbolizes God's judgment. Matthew vividly recorded John the Baptist's message:

The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire [judgment]. 'I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit [signaling a new Era] and with fire [pronouncement of judgment]. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire' (Matthew 3:10-12 NIV).

We know that the Jews were the audience on the day of Pentecost, considering that Pentecost was one of their ceremonial feasts. We have also seen that fire symbolizes judgment and we know that speaking in tongues enabled all the Jews present to hear the message in their native language. Therefore we can conclude that speaking in tongues was the warning sign to the Jews prophesied in Isaiah.

Indeed, He will speak to this people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue (Isaiah 28:11 NASB).

Two distinct things happened on the day of Pentecost:

- Jewish believers, for the first time ever, were baptized into the body of Christ, namely the Church.
- The fire of Pentecost signaled that God was about to judge the Jews—just as the fire of the burning bush signaled that God was about to judge Egypt. Forty years later, in 70 A.D., the judgment was carried out to the full measure just as the Lord had predicted.

As the Jewish Age is ushered out, the Church Age is ushered in. An entirely new Age is born; but no foundation is yet laid, no structure is yet built. Who are the custodians of the blueprint of the new Church Age? The Apostles! They were the only graduates of our Lord's "Church Age Theological Seminary." They were the eyewitnesses of everything the Lord did! They witnessed all His miraculous work (John 20:31). They were the Twelve men chosen to establish the Church in the devil's world (2 Corinthians 4:4). Their task was unique! It was the Lord's task to give them badges of recognition. And He did—the Apostolic miracle-sign-badge!

We are close to zeroing in on the fact that the badge of "miracles, signs and wonders" ended with the Apostles!!! Simply put, God tailor-made this badge in the Church Age specifically for these special Apostles. In order to accommodate anyone other than the Apostles to wear this miracle-sign-badge, we would have to erase passages of Scripture—an offense any serious Bible student would want to avoid.

The Twelve Apostles: Unique Ambassadors

The Twelve Apostles were a unique group of people—chosen men of God, Church Age foundation builders, and custodians of the teaching for the new Church Age. Their assignment as the Lord’s messengers was unprecedented. Their duties included, but were not limited to, proclaiming the Gospel, planting churches, and instituting worship protocols. They were called to operate in an unfamiliar atmosphere where their message was entirely new to their audience.

Imagine an age without cell phones, television or newspapers—news traveled slowly. No one beyond the area of Jerusalem had ever heard of Jesus Christ being the Son of God, or His death on the Cross, let alone His resurrection from the dead. No one had ever heard the new Church Age doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, much less His baptism and issuing of spiritual gifts to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Equally no one had ever heard that all believers in Christ become members of the body of Christ.

This news required special messengers and supernatural manifestations to authenticate them! Therein is the gift of Apostle and its miracle-sign-badge. To better understand the spiritual gifts of miracles, signs, and wonders and their roles, it’s imperative to have a measure of understanding of the gift of Apostle. There are three groups of Apostles mentioned in the New Testament, namely:

- Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:1)
- The Twelve—“unique Apostles” (Matthew 10:5; Acts 6:2)
- The associates of the Twelve, for example, Barnabas, Steven and Philip the Evangelist (Romans 16:7)

Apostolos is the Greek word for Apostle. It means “sent forth” according to the *Greek Lexical Dictionary*. The word was used in reference to our Lord Jesus Christ because He was One sent from God

the Father (Hebrews 3:1). It was also used to reference the unique Twelve Jesus chose and a few of their associates. We are interested in the study of this subject as it relates to the Twelve because that's the root of heresy today. Some churches teach that the spiritual gift of Apostle has not ceased. But the Bible teaches otherwise.

As I conduct conferences around the world it becomes apparent to me why many hold on to the idea that this spiritual gift is still in effect today. They have come to understand that the gift of Apostle is the highest spiritual gift in the Church, which is true. As a result some claim to be Apostles so that others would look up to them as "church-kings." I have even met those who called themselves *senior Apostles*, in other words "king of church-kings." That's nothing but power lust, which was the root of Satan's original sin of arrogance.

On one occasion, I was invited to teach at a conference, and when I looked at the banner, I was surprised to read, "THE GATHERING OF THE APOSTLES." These brethren even had the title Apostle on their name tags. But not for long; for they were liberated when illumination from God the Holy Spirit was sharply cast on the doctrine of Apostleship. These ministers were open to the Truth and willing to look at what the Bible says. Their positive attitude to the message set them free from the bondage of falsehood.

'So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:36 NASB).

A pastor even came to me and pleaded, "Come to my church and teach this Truth to my congregation and tell my members that I am not really an Apostle!" My friend, I tell you the Truth, humility is the key to freedom from the bondage of falsehood.

'God opposes the proud but gives [greater] grace to the humble' (James 4:6b NIV).

Here is direction on how to be a candidate for promotion in God's kingdom!

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time (1 Peter 5:6 NIV).

As you are studying you are challenged to pause and ask yourself,

- Am I a humble believer?
- When the Holy Spirit sheds light on the Truth of God’s Word, am I willing to substitute Truth for falsehood, no matter the cost?

We must all shun falsehood in all its ugliness whenever and wherever it’s exposed!

So what’s the purpose of the gift of Apostle? Before answering this question, let’s examine the calling and training of the Apostles.

Jesus Calls the Apostles

Prior to the inauguration of His public ministry, the calling of the Apostles was the first priority in our Lord’s agenda. He took this seriously. He didn’t just go to the streets and call anyone that passed by. Rather Jesus spent all night in prayer with God, asking His Father to lead Him to the appointed candidates including Judas Iscariot, the one who would betray Him.

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles” (Luke 6:12-13 NIV).

There we have it on record! He chose twelve, not thirteen nor a thousand. Wouldn’t you agree that twelve is a very small number considering the task ahead? But, He only chose twelve! That number is very significant, because it will shed light on the fact that the gift has ceased. And if the gift has ceased, (and it has, as we shall demonstrate from Scripture), then also the spectacular gifts, of healing— “miracles, signs and wonders” that go with the gift, are a thing of the past. Notice all the Apostles were male believers—no female Apostles.⁴

These special Apostles were chosen to be personally trained by Jesus Christ Himself.

⁴Moses C. Onwubiko, *The Dynamic Power of the Holy Spirit*

The Apostolic Age “Theological Seminary”

Have you ever wondered why the Lord didn't wait for the Church to be instituted before calling and training His twelve Apostles? The answer is simple. The Lord needed eyewitnesses. No one could be called as a witness in a Jewish court of law unless the individual was an eyewitness of the incident in question (Acts 1:21-22). Therefore Jesus, presenting Himself as Messiah with identifying credentials, needed a special group of eyewitnesses. These He knew, would go to any length, any height, any dimension, against all odds, to declare His Good News. He knew that with their eyes turned heavenward, they would declare with authority what they heard and saw.

This is true even today. You report with authority when you see something with your own eyes, when you are an eyewitness to an event. Isn't it so? This explains our Lord's words to His disciples:

‘When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me **from the beginning**’ (John 15:26-27 NIV).

It also explains Peter's boldness in his epistle:

We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:16-19 NIV; cf. 1 John 1:2-3 NIV).

The Apostle John added:

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:2-3 NIV).

When Luke wrote to Theophilus concerning the work of Christ, he did so after a thorough investigation from the eyewitnesses, namely, the Lord's Apostles. And so he penned his gospel with certainty.

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus (Luke 1:1-3 NIV).

Luke also recorded the words of the Apostle Peter:

You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. 'We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:37-42 NIV).

The Lord took every precaution to train and equip His special messengers, comparable to the military's "special forces," for the special task ahead. He made sure the Apostles were there wherever and whenever His Messianic credentials were used. His special messengers witnessed every miracle He performed, including using water alone to make wine. His miracles were not only to demonstrate that He is the Messiah, but to raise the Apostles' confidence in Him as their Master, Lord and Savior. No wonder they were unstoppable in the mission field! They were eyewitnesses! They saw the real thing! God in action!

Now we are ready for the next increment in our study.

What's the purpose of the gift of Apostle?

The purpose of the gift of Apostle as it relates to the Twelve is threefold.

1. That there were Twelve Apostles relates to the future reign of Christ (Luke 22:30).

Have we ever questioned why the Lord appointed exactly twelve Apostles—no more—no less—with no succession to the office authorized anywhere in Scripture? Unquestionably there is a future for the Jews. The Lord is not through with them yet (Romans 9-11). Our Lord had their future in mind as He selected the Twelve. Usually when the Bible talks about the nation of Israel, it is often referred to in terms of tribes, twelve to be exact (Exodus 24:4; 28:21; Joshua 4:1-7; Revelation 7:4-8; Luke 22:30). Each of these Twelve Apostles will be assigned a tribe. We know this from Scripture.

You [the apostles] are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:28-30 NIV).

Here we have it on record! Twelve tribes! Twelve special Apostles! One-to-one ratio!

2. The Twelve Apostles were to be instrumental in laying the foundation of the early church.

They were the only ones with the Church Age plan. They were given the task of constructing the foundation of the Church so that you and I could be privileged to build on the finished foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11-15). In Paul's epistle we read,

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, **built on the foundation** of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-20 NIV).

3. The Twelve Apostles were receiving and recording Church Age doctrines (Colossians 1:25-27; cf. 2 Peter 2:20) as well as disseminating the Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8).

Accomplishing these and other pertinent tasks was no small matter in the devil's world. And so to be authoritative, respected and effective witnesses, they needed a distinct badge of recognition! The Lord did exactly that by giving them an apostolic-miracle-sign-badge! How do we know this?

And at the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people (Acts 5:12a NASB).

So Paul [the Apostle] and Barnabas [his aide] spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed [authenticated] the message of his grace by enabling them [the Apostle and his associate] to do miraculous signs and wonders (Acts 14:3 NIV).

How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those [the Apostles] who heard, God also testifying with them [the Apostles] both by signs and wonders and by various miracles (Hebrews 2:3, 4a NASB).

You see, only the Apostles or their associates had anything to do with miracles, signs and wonders in the Church Age. You say what about evangelists Philip and Steven? They too were the Apos-

tles' associates. We shall demonstrate in chapter eight that only the Apostles and their associates had any contact with this unique sign-badge. But first, let's consider these two healing miracles:

The spectacular miracle at Troas:

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'He's alive!' Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted (Acts 20:7-12 NIV).

The spectacular miracle at Joppa:

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, 'Please come at once!' Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room [none of the believers was called to assist]; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord (Acts 9:36-42 NIV).

In Troas, who was at the scene of the dead man? The Apostle Paul of course! Were there any prayer meetings conducted? No! Does that mean that no believer in the whole church of Troas had the gift of healing? Definitely so! Apostles were the only ones with the gift of healing! They were the only ones with a spectacular miracle-sign-badge!

What about at Joppa? Why did believers in Joppa have to send for the Apostle Peter who was at Lydda, about 12 miles from Joppa? Again, was there no one with the gift of healing in the entire vicinity? How could the Holy Spirit fail to give such an important gift to at least one member? Is there no miracle worker in the whole town? No, not one!

Again, this demonstrates that the gift of healing was only for the Apostles, it was an Apostolic sign-badge! No other explanations will suffice! If we say otherwise we become guilty of adding to Scripture, which invites severe rebuke from God (Proverbs 30:6, Revelation 22:18; cf. James 3:1). Now we can underscore, italicize and highlight this Truth of the Scripture with certainty: ***“And at the hands of the Apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people.”***

Read it again! At the hands of who? Apostles! That’s right! Apostles! Consequently, unless anyone can prove from the Word of God that the gift of Apostle has not ceased, then no one can claim to be a healer or miracle worker! When we get to chapter 8, we shall demonstrate the cessation of this unique gift.

Peter and Paul: The “Five Star General” Apostles

“Rank has its privilege” is an old saying. Take for instance the military: rank sets one apart from another. Those with the rank of five-star general stand out from the rest. They are easily recognizable based on the insignia (badges) they wear, which grant them maximum respect from soldiers and fellow officers. As far as military structure goes, no military personnel under them have the power to undercut their authority. These generals have supreme command authority. Simply put, their orders have no room for discussion. They answer to no one except the commander-in-chief of the armed forces or his deputies. Similarly, the Lord promoted two individual Apostles, namely Peter and Paul, to a rank equivalent of a five-star general, decorating them with a rank that set them apart from the rest.

First, we begin with the Apostle Peter. The Lord called Peter to be an Apostle to the Jews. He was commissioned to take the Gospel to the house of Jacob. We know this from Galatians. We read:

On the contrary, they saw that I [Paul] had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:7-8 NIV).

Peter found himself as an Apostle among Apostles in the midst of the Jews where he was in charge of taking the Gospel to them. Anyone could make a claim to be an Apostle to the Jews, but only one Apostle is so called,

for God is not a God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33a NASB).

Since He called only one Apostle as His chosen commander of the Gospel ministry to the Jews, He issued a “five-star general sign-badge” to distinguish that individual from the rest of the Apostles. The Apostle Peter received a special miracle-sign-badge that no one else ever had. Ever! In reference to this badge, Luke wrote:

The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people ... they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed (Acts 5:12a, 13b-16 NIV).

You read it correctly! *All* of them were healed. No selected few people to be healed as we see in today’s healing hoax campaign. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that, at least, Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Peter’s shadow! This demonstrates the power of the unique sign-badge that set him apart from the rest of the Apostles. God was effecting healing through Peter’s shadow. Yes, it happened only once—to authenticate Peter as the head of a ministry the Lord established to take the Gospel to the Jews. No other Apostle was ever honored in this manner except his colleague, the Apostle Paul. Paul’s badge was slightly different, but nonetheless a “five-star general” miracle sign-badge

Paul was the second and last person who wore this unique badge. He was the “Apostle to the Gentiles.” He was called to go to places where people had not heard about the true God, let alone a Savior. He too needed a miracle-sign-badge to set him apart. He already had the sign-badge available to all the Apostles. This badge he used in his defense to the Corinthians who questioned his Apostleship.

I have made a fool of myself [by trying to prove to you that I am an Apostle], but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior

to the ‘super-apostles’ even though I am nothing. The things [miracle-sign-badge] that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance (2 Corinthians 12:11-12 NIV).

In essence, Paul was saying to the Corinthians, “Look, I have used an Apostolic sign-badge among you proving my Apostleship.” Wouldn’t you agree that if many or all believers, other than the Apostles had the gift of healing, then Paul showing his miracle-sign-badge in defense of his Apostleship would have been meaningless? Not only did he hold the rank and sign-badge of the other Apostles, the Lord also honored him as an Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, Galatians 1:15, 16) and gave him a “five-star general sign-badge” for the assignment. In Acts we read:

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them (Acts 19:11-12 NIV).

God gave Paul a badge that no other Apostle wore, except Peter. This unique miracle happened only once, and it was at Ephesus. God set him apart in this manner. No other Apostle ever had such an unusual experience. Even so, Paul’s handkerchiefs and aprons were never preserved or sent to a miracle distributing center for mailing to those who might be in need of healing. They were never duplicated and sent to various churches in Asia Minor⁵ for their healing needs. Such an act would have been tantamount to occultism, which depicts many so called miracle healers today. Do not allow Satan to lure you into his camp. He is so crafty and shrewd, more than we credit him! Prayer cloths are nothing but another form of occultism. Resist the devil!

The Jews tried to duplicate Paul’s miracle:

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, ‘In the name of Jesus,

⁵ Asia Minor today is the peninsula in West Asia between the Black and Mediterranean seas, including most of Asiatic Turkey.

whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.’ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus [the unique Apostle] I know, and I know about [the Apostle] Paul, but who are you [Are you an Apostle? What are your credentials]?’ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor (Acts 19:13-17 NIV).

The experience of these false miracle workers as seen with the sons of Sceva should serve as a sharp warning to anyone who dares meddle with God’s program. The miracle sign-badge was unique to the Apostles as we have already seen. When the Apostolic mission was accomplished, **ALL badges were withdrawn**. Even the Apostle Paul, at the end of his ministry could no longer heal at will. We shall examine this later in our study.

The fact remains that the Lord chose Twelve Apostles for a special purpose in His program. Do you ask:

“What about Judas Iscariot, Matthias and Paul?”

“Were they not called by the Lord?”

“If so, don’t we have fourteen special Apostles, instead of Twelve?”

“Who shall be left out to rule in the assignment of the twelve tribes as was pointed out in Luke 22:30?”

We shall deal with these questions in the next chapter.

The Gift of Apostle Ceases

Love never fails, but if there are gifts of prophesy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away (1 Corinthians 13:8-10 NASB).

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV).

Scripture is a sure test for all Truth. Conversely, we do not rely on our experience. We rely on what the Bible says. When in doubt of what God expects of us, we consult Scripture. When there are differences, we examine Scripture. God the Holy Spirit guides and illuminates our study. Scripture, not experience is *useful for teaching and correcting!* Now we are ready for Scriptural enlightenment.

The first concept in our examination of the Truth is that all the Twelve Apostles documented in Scripture were called directly by the Lord Jesus Christ. These He called for a threefold-ministry as noted:

- foundation of the church
- dissemination of the Gospel and Church Age doctrine
- future reign of the twelve tribes of Israel

He created twelve seats for the twelve chosen Apostles, and allowed Judas Iscariot, an unbeliever, to temporarily occupy one of the seats until Paul was prepared and eventually filled the vacancy left by Judas. We know from Scripture that Paul's Apostleship was preordained by God as he tells us:

But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man (Galatians 1:15-16 NIV).

You see, the Lord knew that at the right time Paul would be called to occupy his Apostolic seat, which was prepared before the creation of the world. But in the meantime, Judas fulfill his own mission, which also was known to God in the ages past. Someone may ask, “How do we know for sure that Judas was an unbeliever?” Scripture alone has the answer. There are reasons that compel us to conclude that he is not born-again:

1. Jesus called him son of perdition and thus excluded him from His High Priestly prayer (John 17:12).

2. Judas was never spiritually cleansed. Our Lord points this out as the Apostle John tells us:

Jesus answered, ‘A person who has had a bath [reference to salvation] needs only to wash his feet [confession of his sins, when he fails, for restoration to fellowship {1 John 1:9}]; his whole body is clean [spiritual cleansing]. And you are clean [salvation by faith alone], though not every one of you [is saved].’ For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean [saved] (John 13:10-11 cf. 15:3; Titus 3:5 NIV).

Elsewhere John records our Lord saying:

Yet there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him (John 6:64 NIV).

Simon Peter answered him:

‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’ Then Jesus replied, ‘Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!’ (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.) (John 6:68-71 NIV).

With Judas Iscariot gone, there was a vacant Apostolic seat which the Apostle Peter was hesitant in filling as we noticed in Acts chapter one. Matthias was elected to replace Judas by the casting of lots. This was the last time Matthias was ever mentioned in the Bible.

Apostleship is not a matter of a vote or election.

It is a spiritual gift from God (1 Corinthians 12:4, 28; Ephesians 4:8, 11). Our Lord, in His infinite wisdom by-passed their ignorance and personally called the Apostle Paul as He had called the rest. There is no record in Scripture that the Lord ever called anyone else after the call of the Apostle Paul. And so from Scriptural deduction, it was the Apostle Paul's slot that Judas occupied. Once Paul filled that vacant spot the Lord never again called anyone; the appointing of Apostles had ended. The Apostle Paul puts it best:

Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them [other Apostles]—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me (1 Corinthians 15:7-10 NIV).

Now that we have settled the issue of Judas, Matthias and Paul, we can proceed with the main subject of this chapter: the cessation of the gift of Apostleship. This spiritual gift has ceased; the Twelve Apostles have been selected and their assignment of laying the foundation of the church completed.

Having been **built on** the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone (Ephesians 2:20 NASB).

The words “built upon” in Greek are in the aorist, passive, participle. That's very significant. The aorist participle in the original language indicates the action of laying the foundation of the church

took place at a point of time and is no longer in progress. The passive voice underscores that God has laid the foundation using the Apostles as special agents. The work has been completed, and it is now a thing of the past.

We can also look in the book of Hebrews:

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After [indicating in the past] it was first spoken through the Lord [that is the Lord no longer speaks as He spoke when He was with the apostles], it was confirmed [indicating action that was completed at a point of time] to us [believers] by those [the apostles] who heard [indicating that they no longer hear Him at the time of writing] (Hebrews 2:3 NASB).

God also testified [past action] to it [their testimony—God authenticated their testimony] by signs, wonders and various miracles (Hebrews 2:4 NIV).

Here again it's apparent that the Apostolic testimony and their authenticating sign-badge of miracles, signs and wonders were a thing of the past.

Consider also this requirement for the office of Apostle: To be qualified as an Apostle one must have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. The Apostle Peter made this a requirement for anyone desiring to be an Apostle, after the death of Judas Iscariot. This we know from Scripture (Acts 1:21-22). The Apostle Paul used this in his defense, as he tells us in Corinthians:

Am I not free? **Am I not an apostle?** Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me (1 Corinthians 9:1-3 NIV).

The Corinthians questioned Paul's claim of Apostleship, which forced him to mount a vigorous defense as noted (2 Corinthians 12:12—"do I not carry with me a sign-badge of a true Apostle, namely, the ability to perform miracles, signs and wonders?").

Today we no longer see the resurrected Christ. Many, because of their ignorance of what the Bible says, still claim to see visions of Jesus Christ. To these claims Scripture cries NO! This Biblical Truth is brought to light here:

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Peter 1:8 NIV).

Again, visions of Jesus Christ are a thing of the past; they are no more. And no one can be qualified to be an Apostle except he had witnessed the risen Savior. You can see why we claim that the gift of Apostleship has ceased. The Scripture is crystal clear: “YOU DO NOT SEE HIM NOW.” To be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ is a requirement if anyone is to receive the gift of Apostle. The Bible makes it clear that *we no longer see Him. This disqualifies anyone who claims to be an Apostle today!* That’s the Word of God!

Consequently, the sign-badge (miracles, signs and wonders that accompanied this unique gift) are no longer being issued. Whoever claims to have the ability to perform miracles, signs and wonders stands in opposition to Scripture.

The gift of sign-badge was only available to the Apostles as previously communicated. The Scripture can not be over quoted, and so we reread the famous paragraph that Paul used in his defense to prove his Apostleship.

The **signs of a true Apostle** were performed [by me] among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles (2 Corinthians 12:12 NASB).

Remember, Paul, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, wrote the above Scripture in defense of his own Apostleship. Another way of putting Paul’s words in layman’s language is this: “No one can perform a miracle, except he be an Apostle. But for you Corinthians, you have witnessed me perform miracles among you, which is the only proof that you need that I am an Apostle.” It would have been totally unwise and absurd for Paul to use the above verse in defense of his Apostleship if this gift had been available to anyone other than the Apostles.

If this gift was still available, those of you who claim to be a miracle worker, a healer or a worker of wonders, are you an Apostle? If not, then why do you make claims unique to the Apostles?

My friend, it's not too late to walk away from falsehood. We all fail spiritually. But the grace of God never fails us; that's why God the Holy Spirit shines His beam of light on the Truth of God's Word. That's why He has brought this Truth to you. That is grace!

However, if you insist on falsehood, you risk divine judgment. (Matthew 12:36, Hosea 4:6a)

Do you ask, "What about Mark 16:17, which says, 'And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues?'"

You are not alone. I have heard this argument a thousand times! However, the text ends at Mark 16:8. Verses 9-20 are not considered part of the canon of Scripture by most Bible scholars (many Bibles even have a footnote to this effect). Furthermore the content is contradictory to 1 Corinthians. This can be verified by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Paul maintains that the miracle-sign-badge is unique to the Apostles, but Mark 16:17 claims that it is available to all believers: "These signs will accompany those who believe: ...they will speak in new tongues." This states that everyone, without exception, will speak in tongues when he believes in Christ. Isn't that what it says? Let us compare this with what Paul says. He posed these questions:

Are all apostles? [Of course, not everyone was an Apostle]
Are all prophets? [No] Are all teachers? [Again no] Do all work miracles? [No!] Do all have gifts of healing? [No] Do all speak in tongues [No! That's not God's design]? Do all interpret? [No] (1 Corinthians 12:29-30 NIV).

Mark 16:17 contradicts 1 Corinthians 12:30, where Paul underscores that spiritual gifts are a matter of division of labor. In his anatomy analogy, he argues:

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?
If the whole were hearing where would the sense of smell be? (1 Corinthians 12:17 NASB).

Paul was saying that it wasn't God's design for the whole body of Christ to have the same spiritual gift. But that's the opposite of Mark 16:17. What a smart move by the enemy of Truth to tamper with Scripture! The mistaken addition of these verses to the Scripture has caused more harm than good to the body of Christ.

The Apostolic badge of recognition has been withdrawn. The mission has been accomplished; the foundation of the church has been laid once and for all! The new doctrines of the Church Age were recorded as the New Testament. The display of the Apostle's sign-badge was no longer necessary.

We see the parallel from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Once the Bible is reduced to writing, the need for a sign-badge is over. Once the Torah was recorded, Moses' sign-badge was no longer needed and so once the New Testament was recorded the Apostles' sign-badge was also no longer needed.

Think about it. The Apostle Paul, at the close of his ministry could no longer perform miracles at will.

The Bible documents three cases for us to ponder.

1. But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died [because I couldn't heal him at will]. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow (Philippians 2:25-27 NIV).
2. Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20 NIV).

If the Apostle Paul still had the healing power associated with his "five-star general" miracle-sign-badge he would never have left a fellow worker sick. Would he? Reflect on this for a moment. This is the Word of God! God's Word always calls for reflection; so take a moment to ponder and ask the Holy Spirit for discernment!

3. Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses (1 Timothy 5:23 NIV).

Instead of uttering the words of healing, the Apostle spoke the words of a medical doctor; for he gave Timothy some medical advice. Paul couldn't heal because his miracle-sign-badge had been retired. His mission has been faithfully fulfilled. He was already looking forward to seeing his Savior, Jesus Christ. In his last epistle he wrote:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race [my Apostolic service has been duly executed], I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7-8 NIV).

The Apostle's assignment was accomplished; therefore his badge was retired.

Let's close this chapter with two important questions:

- Who were the true miracle workers in Church history? Did God use believers in various churches to demonstrate His miraculous power? No! The true miracle workers were the true Apostles (1 Corinthians 12:12) and their associates (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 14:3).
- Do we have true Apostles today? Not according to Scripture. On the authority of Scripture we can dogmatically conclude that we no longer have God-sent miracle workers today.

Are you thinking, "But I have seen some of these modern day healers perform miracles. How can you convince me that their work is not of the Lord?" We will investigate this phenomenon in the next chapter.

ERA THREE CONTINUES: The Church Age

*Post-canon Period - The Bible Completed in
Written Form (begins 96 A.D.)*

A Deluding Influence

God still performs miracles. However, He does not do so through divinely gifted individuals as in the days of the Apostles. His sovereignty, not anyone else's decree, determines the place, the time and the means to display His power in a way that leaves us breathless. He is still a miracle working God! He can perform miracles anytime, anywhere without any command on our part. He may also perform miracles in response to the prayers of His children, including you! We shall examine prayer of the saints in Chapter 10.

Miracles are not the issue; the issue is whose side are you on? This portion of our study is so critical, that it deserves your full concentration. It's a matter of life and death. It's a matter of being on God's side, or Satan's side. It's a matter of becoming a winner believer, or a loser believer, for both time and eternity. You are about to be exposed to the Truth of the infallible Word in such a way that will compel you to either embrace God and what His Truth represents, or reject Him and His Truth and slide backward in your spiritual life.

Christianity, in its present state, is anything but appealing. It has sunk low into apostasy because of our attitude toward sound Bible teaching. We have replaced His Truth with falsehood. We have replaced His Truth with emotional entertainment. No wonder the Apostle Paul lamented:

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith [sound teaching] and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:1-2 NIV).

For the time will come [it's already here] when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of [false] teachers [miracle workers and prosperity preachers] to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NIV).

Overall, we have demonstrated through Scripture that the gift of healing—“miracles, signs, and wonders”—is a thing of the past. If you turn on your television, you can see men and women falsely making claims to possess dynamic power. Their claims have a wide range: the power to heal the sick, cast out demons, open the eyes of the blind, raise the dead, and convey riches on people. Who are they? On whose side are they operating? God's side or Satan's? Who is sponsoring their activities?

Brace yourself for the Truth. God is the Chief Sponsor behind their dubious work. Shocking, is it not? God is responsible. Did I hear, “How?” God does so through the authorization of ‘a deluding influence’ mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:11. There's always a hidden danger when we *habitually reject* sound Bible teaching. Sooner or later, God's grace will be withdrawn and He will hand us over to our heart's desires, whatever they may be. The Apostle Paul underscores this phenomenal Truth in his letter to the Romans, and so we read,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Therefore **God gave them over in the lust of their hearts** to impurity, so that their bodies might be dishonored among them (Romans 1:18, 24 NASB).

When we are finished with this exposition, its outcome will propel us in one of two directions—toward God's plan or away from it and deeper into falsehood. We cannot be neutral! Keep in mind that these modern day miracle workers are not God's servants because they are in opposition to Scripture.

You say, “How are they in opposition?” Your question shows that you have not fully grasped the doctrinal exposition in this book. If not it would be wise to go through this material one more time—or as many times as is needed—for you to completely understand what is being taught. It’s that important! We have proven that the miracle-sign gifts were apostolic gifts at the beginning of the Church Age. Similarly we have clearly demonstrated from the Bible that the gift of Apostleship has ceased.

In conclusion: Anyone, great or small, who promotes or becomes involved in what God says has ceased, runs a risk of a head-on collision with God’s program, and thus positions himself as God’s enemy.

Can you and I afford to be on the opposing side of God? We just cannot!

Verifiable Claims of the Miracle Workers

It is beyond the scope of this book to take on the task of disproving or proving the authenticity of the claims of the modern day miracle workers. Some may be authentic and others anything but authentic. Many of these claimants may have actually experienced miraculous power charging through them in their campaigns. Our experiences can be deceiving, and are often a poor indicator in God’s scheme of testing. Simply put, we can not interpret Scripture based on experience and people’s testimonies, real or imagined. Rather, Scripture alone must interpret our experience; and when there is opposition, Scripture wins. Always!

Experience can be *very deceptive*. Satan is acutely aware of this, and works behind the scenes to bring about real experiences that are in opposition to Scripture. Why? He wants us to doubt or question the validity of God’s Word. Doubt is one of his best weapons. He used it against Eve, and it worked.

Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the Garden?’ (Genesis 3:1b NIV)

Doubt was his crafty way of getting Eve to start wondering about the authenticity of God’s commandment. When Satan noticed that she was doubting God, he was sure the rest of his deceptive dialogue would work to mislead her. It worked! He won!

Today many are already caught in the shackles of experience. They often have difficulty accepting the Truth, especially when the Truth is in opposition to their personal experience.

To a large extent, their experiential claims could be authentic. Again, that makes it even more difficult to listen to anyone else. They claim, “We have seen wonders in our camp meeting. How dare anyone tell us we are in error!” BUT, WHO IS BEHIND THE EXPERIENCE? God. God has given them over to “a deluding influence.” God responds according to their desire using demonic delusion as His agent to accomplish His means (2 Chronicles 18:18-22; cf. Psalm 103:20). But God brings about a deluding spirit as a means of divine punishment only after **habitual rejection** of His Truth.

My friend, it’s deeply troubling, and frightening when God is not on our side. It’s horrifying to contemplate being on the opposing side of God. When we reject sound Bible teaching, the alternative is dreadful and fearsome as far as our spiritual life is concerned. Miracle workers and their associates have rejected Truth—God has responded in kind.

The Chief Sponsor of Today’s Healers

It’s hard to imagine when we suggest that God is actually involved in modern day “signs and miracles”. It does not give Him pleasure that He is involved; on the contrary, it displeases Him that believers have turned their backs on His unique plan for the age. In response to their rejection of the Truth, the Apostle Paul wrote:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of **counterfeit** miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing [those who have rejected the Truth]. They perish because they refused to love the truth [of sound Bible teaching] and so be saved [or be delivered from the consequences of falsehood]. *For this reason [rejection of Truth] God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness* (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 NIV).

Satan is the god of this world and he works hard to oppose God. He is the master counterfeiter in every sense of the word. Armed with the knowledge that the Apostles had a large crowd and remarkable success, he has craftily duplicated the miraculous work of the Apostles so as to attract the largest audience in history. But who is his audience? Let's review this verse again.

For the time will come [it's already here] when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of [false] teachers [miracle workers and prosperity preachers] to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NIV).

Here is Satan's audience: His audience includes men and women who fail to learn the Truth and therefore fail to "*grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" It includes those who will not tolerate sound Bible teaching. It includes believers and unbelievers who swarm like bees to camp meetings where these so called healers are featured. It also includes those who hold the healing meetings. Simply put, Satan's audience includes anyone who rejects Bible Truth.

My friend, are you in Satan's audience? If so, switch positions now before it's too late.

My beloved, there's no easy way to put it. Any time you see these miracle workers and their mega crowds, remember one thing: These are a multitude that have turned their back on sound doctrine, and God has kept His Word:

For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 NIV).

Every believer should petition our gracious God on behalf of those under such influence, for they are in grave error.

Satan, the Master Counterfeiter

Satan is the master counterfeiter. As we have seen he too can perform miracles, signs and wonders. These modern day miracle workers perform Satan's handiwork. That's why we don't dispute their claims. In fact, many would use their miracle working experience in their defense against entering into the Lake of Fire. But it won't work. It didn't work in the time of Christ, and it won't work now. In view of this Matthew recorded our Lord saying:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV).

These are sobering words indeed! You can see, those false miracle workers were unbelievers, "*I never knew you,*" yet they actually performed real miracles. Obviously then their power did not come from the Lord. But the question is: Who then provided them with the ability to "perform many miracles"? This experience is of the evil one. Reflect on this. What was true then, is true now. Just because someone performs a miracle, does not necessarily mean that his power is of the Lord. The Truth is that no one has ever performed a single miracle by God's power since the end of the Apostolic era, because God cannot contradict Himself. Miracle working is the sign-badge of a true Apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12); anyone else who claims to have that power today does so in defiance of the written Word of God. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. The Lord warned us in Scripture saying:

For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible (Matthew 24:24 NIV; cf. Revelation 16:14; 13:13-14 NIV).

They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty (Revelation 16:14 NIV).

In light of our doctrinal exposition, the Truth has been crystalized. Can you see why there's so much delusional influence in the world today?

- First, many believers reject Truth, and thus incur God's wrath. After habitual rejection of Truth He grants their hearts desires and permits delusional spirits to entice them to embrace falsehood.
- Second, Satan is in high gear trying to defeat God's program. We know he will lose in the end, but in the meantime, he is inflicting a great deal of harm.

What a shame about those who allow themselves to be his victims!
May the Lord be merciful!

Bible Prescribed Healing Method for the Church

As we near the conclusion of this Biblical exposition, we have the right to ask ourselves this important question: Are we tradition based or Bible-based believers? You may also ask, “What is tradition?” Tradition is simply a method of operation, which is human-mind conceived, hatched and born, then handed down to us from generation to generation. Many of the things we do today in our churches can be classified as tradition. The shouting of “Hallelujah,” “Praise the Lord,” and the like, disrupting the worship service, has its origin from man, not the Bible. Another tradition; evil in nature is “slaying in the spirit,” whereby people are pushed backward during worship.

There is a case where a woman was pushed down during a healing service, fell and injured her spine. She took the organization to court, which ruled in her favor. This organization that claimed to be able to grant her healing, instead confined her to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. That’s a tragedy! Such practice is purely an idea cooked up by man. It’s not Biblical; it’s nothing but tradition. Sure enough, some traditions can be tolerated, while others are simply nonsense as far the Bible is concerned.

Sadly enough, today’s churches are loaded with traditions. We wonder why the Church is not being as spiritually productive as it should be. This spiritual malfunction in the Church can largely be traced to overemphasis on tradition, which operates on human energy rather than divinely authorized spiritual power.

By contrast, Bible-based believers consult Scripture to assure that their worship and methods of operation align with the Word of God. Where tradition exists, they ensure it aligns with what the Bible teaches. Those believers possess a mindset, which is totally immersed in Biblical thinking and standards. Simply, they live and

die with the concept: “What does the Bible say?” They examine everything—seeing if it meets the standards of the Bible.

If we scrutinize the Scripture carefully, we would be compelled to conclude that the modern day miracles, signs and wonders movement is man-made of traditions. There’s no Bible foundation. There’s not a shred of Biblical evidence, or report of any group of believers, in all of the churches ever involved in a healing movement except that they be false Apostles. Rather, we have this profound report:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching [they soaked themselves in the pool of doctrine] and to the fellowship [interaction based on Biblical viewpoint], to the breaking of bread [communion] and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles [not by the church as a whole—only by the Apostles]. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47 NIV).

No wonder the early Church enjoyed such a tremendous success in their evangelistic campaigns. They were Bible-based believers! They had little or no pollution of tradition in their churches. We too can be a blessing to our families, nations and the world when we sincerely and wholeheartedly return to the Bible and its system of thinking.

Biblical Prescription for Healing

We consult the Book of James to see what the Bible teaches concerning illnesses and how to handle them. We know that this book was addressed to those who had received the perfect gift of Salvation from God (James 1:17-18). James’ audience was believers, members of the body of Christ. Note that scholars date the book around 45-50 A.D. The date is important because it will throw more

light on our subject. Bear in mind James wrote his epistle when a majority of the Apostles were still alive. James had a prescription for handling sick people in the church that did not include miracles and is pertinent to us today. We begin in chapter five:

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your 'Yes' be yes, and your 'No,' no, or you will be condemned. Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven (5:10-15 NIV).

Some believers argue that there should not be any room for sickness in our lives as believers. They will have difficulty as we go through this section. James began to address the issue of suffering, which includes, but was not limited to, sickness. He underscored the importance of patience in the midst of suffering. Earlier in the chapter he declared,

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds [including sickness], because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:2-4 NIV).

Later on in the same chapter he rejoiced:

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him (James 1:12 NIV).

James is saying that suffering is part of our spiritual heritage. The Apostle Paul puts it best:

For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake (2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 1:29 NASB).

Suffering is tailor-made to help us develop spiritual capacity. When we consistently apply God's Word to our situation, suffering becomes a blessing in disguise. It intensifies our confidence in God.

Job, in his indescribable suffering, beautifully puts it this way:

Though He slay me, I will hope in Him (Job 13:15a NASB).

This is what James endeavored to underline in his epistle:

Is any one among you suffering? Then he must pray. (James 5:13a NASB)

This is the Bible-based formula to use in your time of need. The Psalmist sang the same stanza:

And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me (Psalm 50:15 NIV).

James encouraged us, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, to cultivate a prayer habit. He reminded us that some of our needs go unmet because we never petition:

“... You do not have, because you do not ask God” (James 4:2 NIV).

Praying for the Sick

Is any one of you sick [weak or bedridden]? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14 NIV)

Here is a verse informing believers what the Bible requires them to do. But before we examine the above verse, we need to ask three important questions.

- 1. Why didn't James recommend that they call a believer within their congregation who had the gift of healing?** Because there is none with the gift except the Apostles, and they were not localized in churches. This is something you and I should never overlook. You ask "Was there was not a single healer in all the churches? No! Not one! The Scripture is always right! It was a gift for the Apostles only! (2 Corinthians 12:12).
- 2. Why didn't James ask that they lay hands on the sick?** That's not the norm for healing; but if it were, that's an Apostolic prerogative. Only Apostles possessed the gift and power to invoke healing on the spot.
- 3. Why didn't James ask them to organize a healing prayer band in the church?** That's not the purpose of the church. Believers in James' day devoted themselves to:
 - The Apostles' teaching
 - The fellowship [interaction based on spiritual viewpoint]
 - The breaking of bread [communion]
 - Prayer

Today whatever we see among the miracles, signs and wonders supporters is an attack on Scripture. Such a movement does not and cannot have the Lord's blessing! Rather those involved remain under the watchful eye of the justice of God. You should never be part of this movement, or sponsor its activities. You do not want to share in any discipline they may receive from God. ... *God sends those so involved a powerful delusion so they will believe the lie and so all will be **condemned** who have not believed the Truth...*

If you reject this Truth, it is apparent why you did. The answer is in God's Word. God has sent you a powerful delusion so that the lie becomes Truth to you.

Oh God, it's my heartfelt desire that You exchange Your mercy for divine discipline for anyone who wants to be set free from this evil.

The Anointing of Oil

Is any one of you sick [very weak or bedridden]? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14 NIV).

The word “sick” is the same as the Greek word rendered “weary” in Hebrews 12:3, and therefore implies that the individual does not have strength to move around. The sick that James described, is not just someone with stomach virus or flu. That’s why James requested the elders of the church pay the invalid a visit.

We are about to untangle another subject of confusion: anointing oil. You would concur with me, that if a patient has been bedridden for a prolonged time, bedsores become a common problem. And so James requested that the elders clean the sores and apply oil, which had a medicinal value. How do we know that it’s not spiritual ceremonial oil that James had in mind? We know from the Greek word used for anoint in the original text. If James had a religious sacrament in mind, he would have used the Greek word *chrino* - to anoint for a spiritual reason. Then, it would have been difficult to dispute. On the contrary, he used another word, *aleipho* - smear, rub or apply, which has no spiritual connotation. Even in the time of Isaiah, oil was used for medicinal purpose. Isaiah wrote concerning the suffering of the Jews because of their spiritual failure:

Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or **soothed with oil** (Isaiah 1:4-6 NIV).

You have seen based on Scripture that miracles, signs and wonders were the authenticating badge of the special Apostles. Now, if the elders should bring about an instant healing by means of anointing oil to the sick, wouldn’t such instant healing fall into the “miracles signs and wonders” category? I would think so. However

we know that God does not make mistakes. The power to perform miracles in the Church Age is unique *only to the Apostles*. We cannot heal with handkerchiefs or by laying hands on people. We cannot effect miraculous healing via the anointing of oil. That's sound teaching of the Bible; and we owe our gratitude to the illuminating ministry of God the Holy Spirit, who has done such a marvelous work in shedding light on the Word of God.

The Big Question

Now we are face-to-face with the BIG question:

What do you do with the Truth you have learned?

Some few years ago, I was in a conference in Cameroon, West Africa. One of the highlights of the conference was an aged pastor, 80 years old who was in attendance. He traveled over 70 miles to attend a program that lasted for 21 days straight. He never missed a class. At the end of the program, he was liberated from the bondage of falsehood. He came to me, and said, "Rev. Moses, how can I ever undo the work that I have done over the years in error as a pastor?" I told him that God in His matchless grace would judge him fairly since his heart was all along yearning for the Truth. The thing that touched me deeply was that this old pastor woke up very early each morning and went house to house presenting the Truth. What a ministry in his old age! What a manifestation of a man with a new heart of Truth!

God had removed the heart of falsehood and transplanted the heart of Truth to him. What a grace gesture! The memory of our encounter lingers on.

What about you? God has brought His Truth to you. What do you think? Will you accept it or reject it? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to walk away from the camp of falsehood?

I have encountered an untold number of ministers and God's children who have embraced sound teaching, and walked away from Satan's domain where falsehood abounds. It's my prayer that we join together in Truth and serve the Living God with a pure heart devoid of falsehood.

My beloved, God in His marvelous grace has given us a tremendous privilege to represent His Kingdom. It's a privilege with a responsibility. Dr. Pentecost said it perfectly: "I trust that the Spirit of God will impress upon you the fact that, having received an appointment as a steward, you must report to Him concerning your faithfulness or faithlessness. Every privilege brings a responsibility, and every responsibility an accountability."⁶

"Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21 NKJ).

⁶Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost, *Design for Discipleship*