

casting out demons, were given as signs connected with preaching the gospel to unbelievers. These statements were addressed to the eleven apostles. It is stated in Mark 16:20 that they preached the gospel and that the Lord worked with them, confirming their message with signs. Clearly this is what is discussed in the passage. The signs confirmed the preaching of the eleven. The same concept is apparent in Hebrews 2:3-4, where it is stated that the Lord confirmed the original eyewitness proclamation of the gospel to the Hebrews by miraculous signs. Once again the miraculous works were signs to unbelievers and confirmed the testimony of those who actually "heard the Lord". This is stated to be a thing of the past and probably refers to apostolic testimony. All of these passages agree in stating that miraculous works, including tongues and healings, were signs to confirm preaching to unbelievers. This agrees with 1 Corinthians 14:22, where the purpose for the gift of tongues is clearly stated to be a sign to unbelievers. All of these passages agree also in connecting the miraculous works with eyewitness testimony. Although from 1 Corinthians it appears that some outside the apostolic circle did exercise miraculous gifts, the testimony is consistent that these were signs to the unbelieving, and were particularly connected with the original gospel proclamation.

There is therefore Biblical evidence that apostle and prophet were only for the beginning or foundational stage of the universal Church (Ephesians 2:20). There is Biblical evidence that the miracles and signs were only for the first generation of believers and were past by the time some of the New Testament was written (Hebrews 2:3-4; Mark 16:17-20). There is Biblical evidence that the sign gifts were mainly apostolic and that their purpose was to confirm the original outreach of the Church. From the Bible alone we would expect the gifts of apostle, prophet, healings, miracles, and tongues to be temporary.

In addition to the direct Biblical evidence, we have also seen that many events described in the book of Acts have not continued in church history, such as Pentecost and the blinding of Elymas the sorcerer. This is additional proof that the Church is not experiencing all of the phenomena which occurred in the beginning Church. New Testament Scripture is not being produced today -- another indication of change.

History demonstrates that the gift of tongues ceased about nineteen hundred years ago. No true prophets, healers, or miracle-workers fitting the description of those in the New Testament have been seen since that time. The alleged miracles of today do not agree with the miracles in the Bible. The healings of today do not agree with the Bible and often fail, which is contrary to the Bible. Snake-handling and poison-drinking, although seldom practiced, often fail. More decisive than any of these discrepancies is the fact that the alleged gift of tongues of today bears little resemblance to the Biblical gift of tongues. Church history amplifies this fact, since there are no instances of miracle-working, healing, or tongues-speaking in all of church history which agree with the Biblical descriptions of these gifts.