



This is not that!

A Case For Cessationism

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Chapter 1: Follow the Evidence

Overview and Introduction

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I. The Definition of Spiritual Gifts

I think most people in this debate would be happy enough with this definition from Thomas Edgar, “God supernaturally gives the believer special ability for service.”¹ The critical elements in the definition are:

- Spiritual gifts come from God
- Spiritual gifts refer to abilities (wholly new or enhanced)
- Spiritual gifts are given to believers
- Spiritual gifts are given for the benefit of others and the glory of God

II. Lists of Spiritual Gifts in the NT

Romans 12	1 Cor 12:8-10	1 Cor 12:28-30	Eph 4	1 Pet 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prophecy • Serving • Teaching • Exhortation • Giving • Leading • Mercy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word of wisdom • Word of knowledge • Faith • Gifts of healing • Miraculous powers • Prophecy • Distinguishing spirits • Speaking in different kinds of tongues • Interpretation of tongues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apostles • Prophets • Teachers • Miracles • Gifts of healing • Helps • Administrations • Tongues • Interpretation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apostles • Prophets • Evangelists • Pastor and Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving • Speaking

¹ Thomas Edgar, Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit, p.26

Most Cessationists divide these spiritual gifts into two categories, supernatural and natural (or general). Supernatural gifts are those where the work of God through the believer is supernatural (e.g., miracles, healings, etc.). Natural gifts are those where the believers have enhanced natural abilities or abilities that are not obviously supernatural. Many continuationists see this distinction as forced.

	Supernatural	Natural/General	
Prophecy	Apostles	Evangelists	Admin
Miracles	Word of wisdom	Pastors/	Encouraging
Healing	Word of knowledge	Teachers	Helps
Tongues	Discerning spirits	Speaking?	Leadership
Interpretation (of tongues)	Faith?	Serving	Mercy
		Helps	Faith?

Kenneth Berding has written an interesting book arguing that most ‘spiritual gift’ lists do not refer to spiritual gifts as classically understood². Except for 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, Berding believes the lists refer to ministries. If he is correct, the only spiritual gifts are the supernatural ones. For our purposes, this still leaves the question open, are these gifts still around today? His premise, however, does impact how one views Apostleship and argues against viewing the ‘non-supernatural’ gifts as gifts traditionally understood.

III. The Positions Defined

1. Continuationism

The Bible teaches that all the gifts continue; nowhere does it say they ceased or will cease in this age.

2. Cessationism

The Bible gives significant evidence that the supernatural gifts have ceased³.

There is a third position called ‘open but cautious’⁴. This refers to people who believe there is not enough biblical evidence to suggest all the supernatural gifts have ceased. However, they are somewhat skeptical about modern charismatic claims concerning the expression of these ‘supernatural’ gifts.

IV. Why This Issue Matters

Many might think that this is very much a ‘secondary’ issue. Since there are many good Christian people and scholars on both sides, it doesn’t matter, and hot debate on this topic can cause unnecessary division and hurt within the body of Christ.

In response, the Christian church has always engaged in ‘hot’ debate on all sorts of theological issues to try and establish the truth. If truth is what sets people free (John 8:31) and reflects the mind of God, then indeed, it is worth pursuing, even when there is strong disagreement.

² Kenneth Berding, *What Are Spiritual Gifts: Rethinking the Conventional View*, Kregel Publications, 2006. A brief look at his argument will be given when discussing the gift of Apostleship.

³ Some (myself included) argue that all the gifts have ceased.

⁴ See Robert Saucy in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, Zondervan, 1996.

This topic is important for the following reasons:

1. God's reputation and his church's integrity are at stake. All doctrine reflects a person's or church's understanding of God. To the degree we hold to false doctrine, to that same degree we misrepresent God. With this issue, one side is guilty of making false claims about the Holy Spirit and the purpose of God in this age. This means one side is understanding and reflecting God incorrectly at a significant level

2. It shapes the nature and expectation of the spiritual life for the believer. What does it mean for believers to walk by faith? What expectations should a believer have concerning God's power working in and through them? While both sides might agree on some answers to those questions, they differ significantly. Cessationists believe the other side over-promises and under-delivers concerning the spiritual life. At the same time, no doubt continuationists believe the other side under-promises and under-delivers!

3. It affects how the church should function. If continuationists are correct, every church should prioritise teaching their people to discover and use their spiritual gifts so that the church can function properly. Prophecy and tongues (properly defined!) ought to be standard parts of a church service. The church should send miracle workers, healers, apostles, and evangelists to proclaim the Gospel to the masses. If cessationists are correct, prophecy and tongues won't be a part of church services, nor would they have 'ministries' where miracle workers and healers 'do their thing.'

4. It impacts how the Bible should be read and understood. As will be seen in point VIII, hermeneutical differences play a massive part in this debate. Continuationists see significant continuity between the Apostolic age and today, while cessationists do not. Both ways of reading and applying the Bible cannot be correct. Either one or both are wrong.

So, this debate matters! It impacts one's hermeneutic and understanding of God, the Christian life, and the church's function.

V. Main Arguments for Continuationism

Here the arguments will just be stated. They will be defended and refuted in the following sessions.

1. Nowhere in the Bible does it say the gifts have ceased.

2. The Bible teaches the gifts will continue until Jesus returns (1 Cor 13:8-13; Eph 4:11-16).

3. Believers are to emulate the supernatural ministry of Jesus and the Apostles (John 14:12; 1 Cor 11:1; Heb 13:8)

4. Spiritual gifts are necessary for the church's health (1 Cor 12:4-11). This need has not ceased!

VI. Main Arguments for Cessationism

1. "This is not that!". The gifts claimed today do not match those described in the N.T. (Acts 2:6; 5:15f; 11:28).
2. The ministry of Jesus and the Apostles in laying the church's foundation was unique and unrepeatable (Eph 2:20). The 'sign' gifts authenticated the apostles and others involved in building this foundation (Hebrews 2:3-4). With the passing of the apostolic age, the foundation having been laid, the sign gifts were no longer necessary.
3. Another key purpose of the sign gifts related to the offer of the kingdom to Israel. With Israel's rejection of the Messiah and judgment in AD 70, the supernatural gifts faded out.
4. With the completion of Scripture, no more divine revelation was needed (2 Tim 3:16-17). Therefore, there is no further need for revelatory gifts like prophecy, words of wisdom, etc.

VII. Necessary Qualification

The debate is not about God's ability to do miracles today. All evangelicals believe he can. The issue is whether individuals have the same spiritual gifts seen in the N.T.

VIII. Key Differences in the Positions

Concerning key issues:

Issue	Continuationism	Cessationism
How to view/read the supernatural ministry of Jesus and the Apostles	Normative for the church, that is, they are examples to follow. John 14:12, 1 Corinthians 11:1	Unique and therefore unrepeatable. Acts 2:22, Ephesians 2:20, Heb 2:3-4
Purpose of the supernatural gifts	Same as for all the gifts, to build up the church, to help with spiritual formation 1 Cor 12:7-11; Ephesians 4:11-16	Primarily to validate the messengers and message of Christ and the Apostles, to build the Church's foundation Acts 2:22, Heb 2:3-4
Quality of the supernatural gifts expressed by average believers in the NT	Unlike (less than) those expressed by Jesus and the Apostles 1 Cor 13:1, 14:2, 4 Acts 21:10-11 (Agabus) 1 Thess 5:19-22	Just like those expressed by Jesus and the Apostles Acts 2:6, 11:15, 28:17 1 Corinthians 14:20-22

Concerning specific spiritual gifts (each of which will be addressed in its own session)

Supernatural Gift	Continuationism	Cessationism
Apostleship	- Not a gift but an office - OR, like church planting	Unique gift/office limited to the 12 plus Paul.
Miracles/Healings	Under God's sovereignty and subject to other factors like the faith of those involved	Same as Jesus and the Apostles, always successful, mainly in public with nonbelievers
Prophecy	Infallible, fallible (cf. Agabus), and false prophets in the NT	Same as OT prophecy – there were only true and false prophets in the NT
Tongues	Angelic languages or ecstatic utterances, rarely human languages	Human languages not previously known by the speaker

IX. The Nature of Spiritual Gifts

1. The Holy Spirit gave them according to his will (1 Cor 12:11, 18). Continuationists may acknowledge this but may also argue that this doesn't imply passivity on the believer's part. Perhaps God sovereignly gives gifts to those who seek them?⁵

2. Every believer had a gift (1 Cor 12:11). We know the Apostle Paul had many.

3. Not every believer had every gift (1 Cor 12:29f). The original Greek makes this very clear. For this reason, Pentecostals try to say that the tongues in Acts are a sign, but the tongues in 1 Corinthians are a gift. Everyone baptised in the Spirit has the sign of tongues (and any believer can be baptised in the Spirit). In contrast, not everyone is given the gift of tongues as per 1 Cor 12:29f. Alas, for the Pentecostals, this distinction between the gift in Acts and 1 Corinthians is not biblical⁶.

4. They were under the recipient's control (1 Cor 14:26f). This is true for prophecy and tongues and presumably for all the gifts. Charismatics, however, will argue that healings and miracles are not under the control of the one who has the gift. Instead, they are exercised under God's sovereignty and conditioned on the faith of those involved. However, while spiritual gifts could be neglected or quenched (see 1 Timothy 4:14, 1 Thessalonians 5:19), there is no instance in the NT of believers unable to exercise their gift⁷.

5. They were for the common good, the building up of the church (1 Cor 12:7, Eph 4:11f, 1 Pet 4:10). A key argument for the continuationists is that this purpose applies to all the gifts, and since the need for edification has never ceased, so too, none of the gifts designed to meet

⁵ See Grudem, Systematic Theology, pp.1028-1030

⁶ This will be demonstrated in the session on Tongues

⁷ This will be further discussed in the session on Miracles and Healings

that need have ceased. Cessationists posit additional purposes for the sign gifts that relate to their ceasing.

X. Seeking Spiritual Gifts

A significant recurring issue in this debate is whether the Bible calls on individual believers to actively seek spiritual gifts. Here is a summary of the issue:

	Continuationism	Cessationism
Should believers seek spiritual gifts?	Yes!	No!
Biblical Support	1 Cor 12:31 1 Cor 14:1 1 Cor 14:13 1 Cor 14:39	1 Cor 12 - the body metaphor 1 Cor 12:11 - sovereignly given 1 Cor 12:27f - not all have every gift 1 Cor 12:31, 14:1, 14:39 - better translated as 'be zealous.' - plural verbs referring to the church in general

Those who say believers should actively seek spiritual gifts point to the three exhortations or commands from the Apostle Paul that seem to say precisely that:

- 1 Cor 12:31, "But earnestly **desire** the greater gifts." (NASB)
- 1 Cor 14:1, "Pursue love, yet **desire** earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy." (NASB)
- 1 Cor 14:39, "Therefore, my brethren, **desire** earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues." (NASB)

Given the repetition and the fact that these appeals bookend chapter 14, undoubtedly, the argument goes, the point is being emphasised. Often this leads to the idea that any believer can have any gift, or at least that any believer should ask in expectation and faith for any gift. Grudem also mentions 1 Corinthians 14:13, where Paul wrote, "For this reason, anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says." What is praying for the gift of interpretation of tongues if not seeking spiritual gifts?!⁸

At least four lines of evidence can be brought in response to this argument:

1. 1 Corinthians 12:11 makes it clear that the Spirit was the one who distributed the gifts according to his own will, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (NASB). To presume that the Spirit's distribution is based on the believer's seeking is to assume too much. After this verse, Paul launches into the body metaphor, where he calls on believers to celebrate their different gifts and be content with

⁸ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, pp.1029. In response, read the verse carefully. Paul didn't say, "pray that you might get the gift of interpretation." Rather, they are to pray they might understand what they, (themselves and only themselves), are praying. His point in the context, ('For this reason...'), is that uninterpreted tongues are useless and don't build up anyone. Therefore, Paul said, "if you do pray in a tongue, ask God that he might give you insight into what it is you just prayed", demonstrating the futility of uninterpreted tongues. Whether or not God would answer such a prayer is moot. Paul's point, as always in 1 Corinthians 14, is uninterpreted tongues are useless.

what they have. Why? Because what they have is from the Spirit, and he knows what he is doing!

2. Paul used the body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 to teach the Corinthians about unity in diversity. Not everybody was the same 'body part,' and that was a good thing because everybody needed everyone else to function well together. The more prominent parts ought not to despise the less prominent parts. This metaphor precludes the idea that everybody can or does have the same gift. More than this, the metaphor admonishes believers to be content with their gifting. Remember God arranged the parts "as he chose". (12:18)

3. 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 teaches that not every believer has every gift. This is in line with v.11 (the Spirit's distribution) and vv.12-26 (the body metaphor). Paul called the believers not to seek gifts but to be satisfied with their gifts⁹.

4. The word in the verses in question, from which many get the idea of seeking the gifts, needs to be examined.¹⁰

First, the word in question in all three verses is ζηλουτε (dza-lou-te). This is the 2nd person plural form of ζηλω (dza-lo-o). 2nd person plural means the exhortation is directed toward the church in Corinth, not an individual. This is significant because it means the church was to be zealous about using the greater gifts in their midst. It need not be interpreted that individuals in the church should seek after gifts. A church is made up of individuals, yet too many commentators undervalue the corporate nature of these commands. Paul, in context, was not counselling individual Corinthians about spiritual gifts; he was scolding the church for being out of order! They needed to think of one another; they needed to think corporately, not just individualistically. Thus, Paul's instructions here are directed to the church as a corporate body, "together have an attitude that prioritises the greater gifts."

Second, this word is not used in the NT for 'seek'.¹¹ Rather ζηλω when used positively, means 'to be zealous for,' and when used negatively means 'jealous'. The word occurs 11 times in the NT:¹²

Acts 7:9 – clearly means 'jealous' ("patriarchs were jealous of Joseph")

Acts 17:5 – clearly indicates 'jealous' ("but the Jews were jealous")

1 Cor 13:4 – clearly means 'jealous' ("love is not jealous")

1 Cor 14:12 – 'zealous' ("you are zealous for spiritual gifts")

2 Cor 11:2 – clearly means 'jealous' (Paul said, "I am jealous for you...")

Gal 4:17 – 'zealous' (the false teachers were 'zealous to win you over')

Gal 4:18 – 'zealous' ("it is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good")

James 4:2 – clearly means 'covet' ("you kill and covet")

1 Cor 12:31 – 'zealous'?

1 Cor 14:1 – 'zealous'?

1 Cor 14:39 – 'zealous'?

⁹ 'Satisfied' v 'seeking' is a great (positive) way to label the two sides in this debate. One side is satisfied with what the Spirit has done, is doing and will do. The other side is seeking the Spirit to do more.

¹⁰ See Edgar for a more thorough examination of this word, pp.32f

¹¹ that would be ζητεω

¹² John Kohlenberger III, The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament, p.2412

Notice that the word is never translated as ‘seek’, not even in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Here are how some of the principal English translations have translated zhlow:

English Translation	12:31	14:1	14:31
CSV	desire	desire	Be eager
ESV	Earnestly desire	Earnestly desire	Earnestly desire
KJV	Covet earnestly	desire	covet
NASB	desire	desire	desire
NCV	Truly want	Truly want	Truly want
NET	Be eager	Be eager	Be eager
NIV	Eagerly desire	desire	Be eager
NRSV	Strive for	Strive for	Be eager

Arguing, then, from the clear to the disputed, it seems the word should be translated as ‘zealous’ in 1 Corinthians 12:31, 14:1, and 14:39. Nowhere does this word mean ‘seek.’ This is significant because a command to be zealous is different from a command to seek. One refers to an attitude, while the other to an action. The Corinthians were to be zealous for exercising the greater gifts among them; in particular, they were to put a premium on prophecy over tongues. The outcome of the zealous attitude would be an orderly service where prophecy was elevated (1 Cor 14:26-40).

Given these four lines of evidence, I suggest that believers were never called upon to ‘seek’ spiritual gifts.¹³

XI. Where To From Here

Chapter 2 – The Case for Cessationism

Chapter 3 – The Gift of Apostleship

Chapter 4 – The Gifts of Miracles and Healings

Chapter 5 – The Gift of Prophecy

Chapter 6 – The Gift of Tongues

Chapter 7 – A Response to Continuationism

¹³ Wayne Grudem has quite a measured discussion on seeking spiritual gifts. While he encourages people to seek gifts, he cautions on the basis of the evidence presented here. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp.1028-1030. David Garland, *1 Corinthians ECNT*, 2003, suggests that the command to ‘earnestly desire spiritual gifts’ refer to not allowing them to be neglected or quenched, p.602.

Chapter 2: This Is Not That A Case for Cessationism

I. Cessationist Logic

II. This is Not That!

III. The Unique Apostolic Age

- 1. An Amazing Age**
- 2. A Foundational Age**
- 3. A Transitional Age**

IV. Miracles and the Offer of the Kingdom

V. No More Revelation Needed

VI. A Little Pentecostal and Charismatic History

VI. Continuationist Logic

I. Cessationist Logic

1. The claimed 'supernatural' gifts today do not match those in the N.T.
2. There are good biblical, theological, and historical reasons that could explain the absence or cessation of the genuine NT supernatural gifts:
 - a) The uniqueness of the supernatural apostolic age. The foundational work of the first generation of the church, especially the Apostles, Prophets and other leaders, was unique. This generation (particularly the leaders) was empowered and validated by their supernatural gifting. When they died, the supernatural gifts ceased.
 - b) The miraculous gifts were associated with the offer of the kingdom to Israel. With Israel's rejection and judgment, the miraculous gifts faded.
 - c) The closing of the canon and the sufficiency of Scripture. If the Scriptures were all the divine revelation the church ever needed, the revelatory gifts were no longer required once Scripture was complete. When precisely these gifts faded, given it took a while for all NT books to be collated and accepted widely, is a moot point for this study.
3. A look into the history of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements should lead believers to be somewhat sceptical about their current claims regarding the gifts.

II. This is Not That!

The supernatural gifts evident in the N.T. are nowhere to be found in the modern church. What Charismatics point to as 'this' (their expression of the NT gifts) is not that (the NT gifts)! This has always been the kryptonite to the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement.

Supernatural Gift	Continuationism	Cessationism
Prophecy	Good prophets can get it wrong.	Good prophets never got it wrong!
Tongues	Ecstatic utterances (not human languages)	Human languages not previously known by the speaker
Miracles	Kinda works sometimes with some 'lesser' illnesses	Worked perfectly every time, everywhere with all illnesses
Apostleship	Not a gift but an office	Unique gift/office limited to the 12 plus Paul.

The NT reveals prophecy as either true or false, but Charismatics have created a new NT category of fallible prophecy. Such prophecy had no OT precedent and is nowhere taught or practised in the NT. Yet fallible prophecy, easily replicated in non-Christian settings, is rampant in Charismatic churches.

The NT reveals that tongues were the ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages (Acts 2:4-6). Charismatics want to redefine the gift as ecstatic utterances (sometimes labelled as a 'heavenly' language). Nobody is seen practising this form of the gift in the NT, nor is it taught anywhere. Yet ecstatic babble, easily replicated by non-Christians, is rampant among Charismatics and Pentecostals¹⁴.

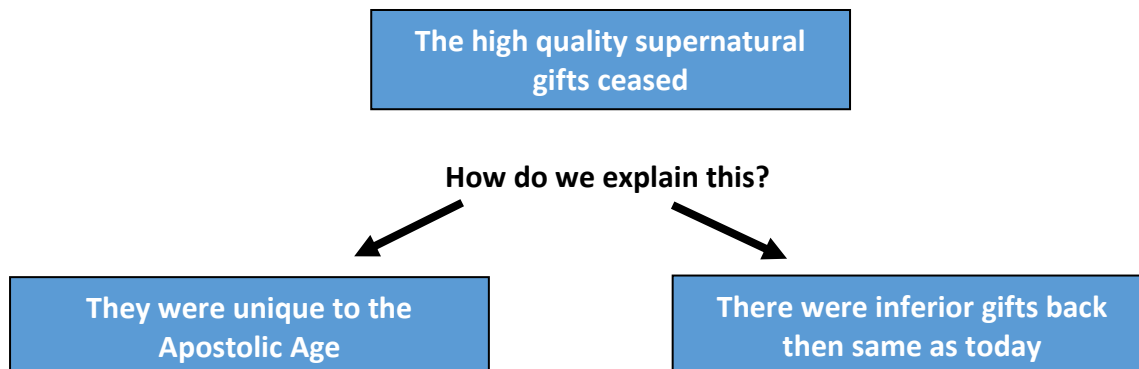
The NT reveals that the gifts of miracles and healings were (usually) used in public and successful with any illness. Charismatics want to redefine the gifts as subject to God's sovereignty, dependent on the faith of all involved, most often conducted in 'church' meetings, and involving illnesses that are difficult to quantify. Such 'gifts' are nowhere seen or taught in the NT. Yet, haphazard, fuzzy miracles and healings, easily replicated by non-Christians, are rampant among Charismatics and Pentecostals.

These claims will be validated in the following sessions covering the spiritual gifts of prophecy, tongues, miracles and healings.

What is fascinating here is that one side argues vehemently for a very 'average' form of spiritual gift, commensurate with the gift's receiver. While the other, often criticised for being 'anti-Spirit', argues vehemently for a very high-quality form of spiritual gift, commensurate with the Giver.

¹⁴ Interestingly the first Pentecostals believed their gift of tongues was the ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages. On the mission field and in other places, it soon became evident that this was not the nature of their gift. Rather than admit error and discontinue the practice, the early Pentecostals simply redefined tongues to mean ecstatic utterances (see point VI).

On the one hand, continuationists argue for great continuity between the time of the Apostles and today. Yet, on the other hand, they will confess that the quality of the gifts today is not the same as was displayed by Jesus and the Apostles¹⁵. So what changed and why?¹⁶ In effect, continuationists have ceded to the cessationists a critical point; the gifts displayed by Jesus and the Apostles are no longer around today¹⁷. This is critical. Both sides believe in the cessation of high-quality supernatural gifts, but they have different explanations for how this relates to today.



The key plank in the cessationist argument is that there were no inferior ‘supernatural’ gifts in the Apostolic Age, and neither are there any today. This is critical to understand. If true, it nullifies what many consider the strongest continuationist arguments from 1 Corinthians 13 and Ephesians 4. The idea is that the supernatural gifts continue until the ‘perfect’ comes (1 Cor 13:8-13) and until the church reaches full maturity (Eph 4:11-16). If, however, the inferior gifts of the continuationists are invalid, then these passages are moot¹⁸.

III. The Unique Apostolic Age

A critical difference between the two camps is the level of continuity they see between the age of the Apostles and today. Continuationists see a high level of continuity, while cessationists see a level of discontinuity. Cessationists claim certain passages in the Gospels and Acts are descriptive only, whereas often continuationists claim they are also prescriptive. Here are some reasons to view the apostolic age as being characterised by many people, events, purposes and phenomena that were unique to that time.

1. An Amazing Age of the Miraculous

Thanks to the Ministry of the Apostles

The 13 Apostles (the 12 plus Paul) filled a unique office. They were gifted with the ability to do “signs, wonders and miracles” (2 Cor 12:12). These supernatural gifts validated both their message and ministry (Rom 15:17-19; Heb 2:3-4).

¹⁵ Deere, *Surprised By the Power of the Spirit*, pp.67-68

¹⁶ Charismatics argue for two tiers/levels/qualities of spiritual gifts – one for Jesus and the Apostles and another for the rank and file believers of the NT and today. The huge problem for them of course is that this is nowhere seen or taught in the NT.

¹⁷ Edgar argues this point well, see pp.19-23

¹⁸ See the session, *Response to Continuationist Arguments*

If the gift of miracles was widespread, then it's hard to see how it served as a sign of an apostle. Charismatics point to Galatians 3:3¹⁹ and 1 Corinthians 1:7²⁰, 12:8-10, 28-30 to argue that the gift of miracles was commonplace. However, the Galatians text does not mention the miracles' source and says nothing about the spiritual gift of miracles. In 1 Corinthians 12, the fact that the gift is listed does not mean the Corinthians had it. The gift of Apostleship is on one of those lists; the Corinthians certainly didn't possess that. For the same reason, 1 Corinthians 1:7 need not mean that members had every gift. They benefited from every gift thanks to the work of the Apostles and perhaps did not lack any speech or knowledge gifts (1 Cor 1:5), but they didn't necessarily evidence every gift.

The only other people, besides the Apostles, recorded in the church age performing miracles were Steven (Acts 6:8), Philip (Acts 8:6) and Barnabas (Acts 15:12). This does not indicate the gift was widespread; in fact, just the opposite²¹. The ministry of these men was unique, and the signs and wonders they performed validated their work. Steven's historic speech in Acts 7 was a judgment oracle against unbelieving Israel²². Philip's ministry expanded the Gospel from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, signifying a significant moment in the history of the church as it moved to incorporate Gentiles for the first time.²³ While Barnabas was the Apostle Paul's co-worker, like Philip, moving the Gospel into uncharted territory.

If the gift of miracles was confined to the Apostles and a few others, then it is likely the gift ceased when they passed away.

Thanks to the Ministry of the Prophets

Along with the Apostles, the NT prophets provided the foundation for the church (Eph 2:20). Unlike Apostleship, this gift was widespread across the churches. Prophets were operating at least in Jerusalem (Acts 15), Corinth (1 Cor 14) and Rome (Rom 12). These gifted people received and communicated direct revelation from God. This revelation served to build up and guide the local churches in the absence of NT Scripture. Once the NT Scriptures were complete, there was no need for such revelatory gifts (see point V below).

As History Testifies

No subsequent age has come anywhere close to exhibiting the supernatural giftedness of the Apostolic age. While Charismatics search history to try and find examples of supernatural gifts, no one can find anything that matches the scale of what took place in the first century. It would seem quite arrogant for some to suggest that only in these last generations has the church re-established apostolic age type miraculous activity through spiritual gifts because (1) the evidence for such activity today is highly contested; (2) there have been great times of revival previously without such spiritually gifted activity;²⁴ and (3) what makes the last 100

¹⁹ "So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by works of the Law or by hearing with faith?" (NASB)

²⁰ "...in everything you were enriched in him, in all speech and in all knowledge,...so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 1:5-7, NASB) Ken Berding writes, "...the context in which charisma is used in 1 Cor 1:7 offers few indications of its meaning." What Are The Spiritual Gifts, pp.37-38. In his book, Berding argues that charisma is probably often better translated as the gift of ministries.

²¹ It's entirely possible (and indeed likely) that Luke recorded the exceptional, not the normal.

²² See main point III Miracles and the offer of the Kingdom. Notice, too, that Steven's speech and martyrdom occur right before the Gospel expands into Gentile territory.

²³ Cf. The spread of the Gospel as per Acts 1:8

²⁴ Think of the Protestant Reformation, the First and Second Great Awakenings, along with other localized revivals. Though often accompanied by unusual manifestations, none of these events evidenced supernaturally gifted individuals as were present in the Apostolic age.

years or so more significant that would warrant such a supposedly dramatic change in spiritually gifted activity?²⁵

2. A Foundational Age

The Apostolic age was foundational. Ephesians 2:20 makes it clear that the Apostles and prophets were the church's foundation, "with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (NIV). It makes sense that just as Christ, the person, was the cornerstone, so to the Apostles and prophets, the people were the foundation. The idea of a foundation is that it only needs to be laid once. A question to be answered is, what constituted the church's foundation? I would suggest it related to 3 connected tasks:

(1) the completion of Scripture, giving the church an inerrant guide concerning truth;

(2) the establishment of the church as genuinely multi-ethnic, with Jews and Gentiles serving together to make disciples of all nations (Eph 3:4-6). As we see from the book of Acts and many of Paul's letters, the Jew-Gentile issue took some time to settle. Note the connection between the decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 recognising this new entity and the immediate ministry of prophets (Judas and Silas) to the Gentiles (Acts 15:30-35).

(3) The transfer and establishment of a lasting leadership structure for the church. The church was birthed under the authority of the Apostles and Prophets (Eph 3:5, 4:11). However, this was not sustainable given their temporary nature. So, the offices of Elder, Deacon and Deaconess were defined and established in the churches.²⁶

With this foundation laid, a key role, perhaps the key role, of the Apostles and Prophets was completed. Therefore, when these individuals passed off the scene, so did their supernatural gifting.

3. A Transitional Age

The Apostolic Age was transitional in several respects from a history of salvation perspective:

- It oversaw the move from the Old Covenant to the New. It took a while for the church to navigate its way from one to the other, as the Council at Jerusalem revealed (Acts 15)²⁷
- It oversaw the establishment of a new entity, the church.
- It oversaw the addition of new revelation to the canon of Scripture.
- It oversaw the extension of the offer of the Davidic Kingdom to Israel (Acts 3:19-21).

The supernatural spiritual gifts greatly aided the early church in effectively overseeing these transitions.

If this were true, you'd expect both the Gospels and the book of Acts to contain transitional elements. To contain descriptive material that is not prescriptive. That is, to document events

²⁵ Thomas Edgar points out that Charismatics want to say that the church stopped believing in the gifts and so they faded out through neglect. But, if they were as widespread and spectacular in the first century as people like Deere think, then how could the church lose faith in them? See Edgar, p.226f

²⁶ See Gene Getz, "Sharpening the Focus of the Church", Chapter 9 for a great discussion of the two overlapping phases of leadership in the NT church.

²⁷ The issues of circumcision (Acts 16:3) and temple sacrifices (Acts 21:20f) were 'live' issues that Paul had to carefully navigate in his ministry.

and procedures that were unique to that time and not meant to be emulated by the church in subsequent times. This is indeed what we find. The following table shows transitional material in two of the most contested passages in this debate, John 14-17 and the Book of Acts.

Transitional Passages in John 14-17 and the Book of Acts	
John 14-17	Acts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jesus washing the disciples' feet (ch.13) - Peter's betrayal predicted (ch.13) - Judas is told to leave (ch.13) - The ability to see Jesus on earth (14:9ff) - The Spirit would remind the disciples about everything Jesus said to them (14:26) - The Spirit would teach the disciples 'ALL' things (14:26) - The disciples grappling fearfully with the idea that Jesus is leaving them (13:33-14:1, 14:27f, 16:6) - The guilt of the Jews for not believing in Jesus despite miracles (15:24) - Jesus' warning that they will put the disciples out of the synagogue (16:2) - Jesus' warning about persecution (16:3-4) [specific to the disciples though true of some others down through history] - The Spirit will guide the disciples into 'ALL' truth (16:13) - The Spirit will tell the disciples what is yet to come (16:14) - The disciple's grief will turn to joy [at his resurrection] (16:20-22) - The disciples will be scattered and desert Jesus (16:32) - Jesus' high priestly prayer (17) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The ascension of Jesus (ch. 1) - The appointment of apostles (ch.1) - Pentecost (the # of people, the languages spoken, the conversions) (ch. 2) - The sharing of goods (ch.4) - The death of Ananias and Sapphira at the feet of Peter (5:5-10) - The transportation of Philip by the Spirit (8:39) - Pauls conversion (9:1-9) - Peter's vision of the sheet (10:10-15) - Paul's blinding of the sorcerer (13:11-12) - The miraculous prison breaks (chs. 5, 12, 16)

This does not establish that everything in these passages is transitional but should serve to caution readers against believing everything in these passages is normative for today.

IV. Miracles and the Offer of the Kingdom

When we talk about the kingdom of God, we could be talking about one of three kingdoms:

- God's universal kingdom over which he has always reigned;
- The Kingdom of Israel established through the agency of Moses;
- The Davidic or Messianic kingdom, an earthly, geopolitical kingdom promised to Israel in which all of God's covenant promises to her will be fulfilled²⁸

The Kingdom of Israel was established with a myriad of miraculous activity. Miracles abounded from the plagues of Egypt to the crossing of the Red Sea, the miraculous provisions

²⁸ The nature of this kingdom and the timing of its inauguration are hotly debated. Amillenials, Pentecostals and Progressive Dispensationalists believe this kingdom has started and Jesus is currently reigning on David's throne in heaven over a 'spiritual' kingdom on earth. Some of these people believe that Jesus will establish the earthly/political aspects of the kingdom upon his return (PDs and Pentecostals). Others believe all the promises made to Israel in the OT are fulfilled in Christ and anticipate no future earthly kingdom (Amillenials who believe the church = Israel). I believe the Scriptures, particularly the OT predictive prophesies, if taken literally, point to this kingdom only being established when Jesus returns (Acts 1:5). Jesus at his ascension sat on His Father's throne (Rev 3:23, not David's), and will one day return to sit on David's throne (Luke 1:32-33). From this throne in Jerusalem he will rule a renewed earth (Zech 14:9) and fulfil all the covenant promises to a regathered and regenerate nation of Israel (Ezek 36-37; Acts 1:5; Rom 11:25-29).

in the desert, and the spectacular judgments. In particular, God used Moses, his chosen leader of the people, to perform many of these miracles. Under Joshua, the miracles continued as Israel settled the land. From here on, miracles sporadically occurred in Israel and Judah till the nation was judged and sent into exile (Jeremiah 32:20). God worked miracles in and around the life of Daniel, showing the people of Israel he was with them even in exile. But after the remnant returned and the book of Malachi was written, God's voice fell silent, and miracles ceased.

When Jesus came preaching the good news of the (Davidic) kingdom, miracles accompanied his ministry (Matt 4:23). These miracles authenticated his person and his offer to Israel. However, though the King came, he was rejected by his own people (John 1:11)²⁹. When Jesus rose from the dead, he taught his disciples about the (Davidic) kingdom, prompting them to ask if he was going to restore this kingdom in the days ahead (Acts 1:3-8). Jesus responded by saying the timing of the kingdom's restoration was not their concern (but note there would be a future restoration). Instead, their concern was to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth in the power of the Spirit. As they did this, Peter offered the kingdom once more to the people of Israel (Acts 3:17f). However, Israel continued to reject this offer, as evidenced by their stoning of Steven. That event marked the movement of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Yet throughout, the ministry of the Apostles (and Steven) was marked by the miraculous to authenticate both their ministry and the offer.

In 1 Corinthians 14:20-22, the Apostle Paul connected the gift of tongues with the announcement of judgement on unbelieving Israel via a reference to Isaiah 28:11-12. In the Isaiah passage, the people of Israel would know they were under God's judgment when they heard foreign languages in their streets. Tongues then functioned as a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers, and in context, it would seem Jewish unbelievers in particular. When judgment finally came on Israel through the Roman invasion of AD 66-70, the gift of tongues and other miraculous gifts were no longer needed to communicate to the rebellious nation.

The idea, then, is that miraculous activity has always been connected with God's kingdom on earth. Where God's kingdom, God's King, or the offer of God's kingdom is on earth, it will be evidenced by the miraculous³⁰.

Here are two lengthy quotes from Alva McClain that may help the reader understand the purpose of the miracles in Acts:

“In the Scriptures, great public exhibitions of miraculous divine power are invariably connected with the Mediatorial Kingdom of God. They are seen in that Kingdom when established at Sinai...and did not wholly cease until it ended with the departure of the Shekinah-Glory (Isa. 37:36; 38:5-9). Such miracles also are recorded in the Old

²⁹ In large part the Jews rejected Jesus because in their understanding of the OT, any messianic claimant would bring in the promised kingdom. They didn't realize the kingdom was conditioned on the nation's repentance, or at least didn't recognize their need for repentance. Since Jesus didn't bring in the kingdom, (due to the nation's unbelief), they concluded he could not be the King. This remains one reason why some Jews reject Jesus to this day.

³⁰ Michael Brown, like most Pentecostals, also sees this link between God's kingdom and the miraculous. The difference is that Brown believes we're in the Messianic kingdom now. Jesus is ruling and so miraculous power to break the devil's strongholds is available to the church. This will be discussed more in the session on miracles. Brown, Michael L.. *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire* (pp. 174-176). Charisma House. Kindle Edition.

Testament predictions of a future re-establishment of the Kingdom under the reign of Messiah. They were also present when the Kingdom was announced as imminent during the period of the Gospels. And their continuance in the Book of Acts must be explained in the same way. They are signs of the Kingdom, given primarily as a testimony to the nation of Israel, to whom in a peculiar sense that Kingdom belonged by divine covenant, and upon whose repentance depended its imminent establishment upon earth. This was the burden of the prophets as they spoke to Israel about the Kingdom (Isa. 35:1-7). The same thing was affirmed by our Lord in His earthly ministry to the chosen nation (Matt 11:15). And it was reaffirmed by the apostles in their testimony to Israel throughout the book of Acts (2:1-20, 43).”³¹

“In a later passage of crucial importance the writer of Hebrews again refers to the miraculous acts of divine power which had characterized the Acts period...reminding the Jewish readers of that generation that they had ‘tasted...the powers of the age to come’ (6:5 ASV). Here the miracles of Acts, although ‘tasted’ by that generation, are clearly placed in the category of things which belong to a future ‘age.’ Now this ‘age to come’ cannot be the Church ‘age’, because that had already begun on Pentecost...Nor can the reference be to heaven or the eternal state, for then there will be no diseased to be healed or demons to be cast out. The true meaning is ‘the age of the Messianic reign,’ which is to follow the church age and will be ushered in at the second advent of Christ. The great miracles of Acts, then, are powers which really belong to the Millennial Kingdom. This suggests that their occasional and partial enjoyment by the generation living during the time of Acts...was intended to authenticate an offer of the Kingdom to Israel, a genuine offer although conditioned on the repentance of the nation. And it explains why, following the crises of Jewish rejection reached in Acts 28 and the destruction of Jerusalem, the age of great public miracles came to an end.”³²

V. No More Revelation Needed

1. The Sufficiency of Scripture Defined

The sufficiency of Scripture means that the 66 books of the Bible are all the divine revelation needed for the believer (and the church) to live faithful and fruitful lives before God. While supplements to the Bible like creeds, doctrinal statements, or commentaries can be an aid to biblical understanding, they are not necessary for a life of faith. Unlike the Bible, such supplements do not carry any divine authority.

2 Timothy 3:15-17, though referring mainly to the OT, nonetheless teaches the principle of the sufficiency of Scripture. There is no good work that Scripture does not equip the believer for:

“¹⁵and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is \square inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for \square training in righteousness; ¹⁷so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (NASB)

³¹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p.411

³² *Ibid.* p.412

2 Peter 1:3-4 likewise emphasises that God has given believers all they need via his 'precious and magnificent promises' all that is required for 'life and godliness:

³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. ⁴ For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature," (NASB)

Usually, those who hold to the sufficiency of Scripture also hold to the authority, inerrancy and clarity of Scripture. Authority means the Bible, as God's word, has God's authority behind it. To disobey the Scriptures (rightly understood) is to disobey God. Inerrancy means the books of the Bible, as originally given, contained no errors. The Scriptures are entirely trustworthy since they were God-breathed and God cannot lie. Clarity means Scripture can be understood if read well, as the author intended.

When taken together, the authority, inerrancy, clarity and sufficiency of Scripture give the believer (and the local church) every confidence that they have all they need from God regarding revelation.

Wayne Grudem explains the sufficiency of Scripture well (though I'd suggest his belief in ongoing revelation is inconsistent with his explanation):

"The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly³³."

He goes on to draw out the implications, the sufficiency of Scripture...

1. ...should encourage us as we try to discover what God would have us think...or do...
2. ...reminds us that we are to add nothing to Scripture and that we are to consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture...
3. ...tells us that God does not require us to believe anything about himself or his redemptive work that is not found in Scripture...
4. ...shows us that no modern revelations from God are to be placed on the same level equal to Scripture in authority...
6. ...tells us that nothing is required of us by God that is not commanded in Scripture either explicitly or by implication...
7. ...reminds us that in our doctrinal and ethical teaching we should emphasize what Scripture emphasizes and be content with what God has told us in Scripture."³⁴

³³ Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.127

³⁴ Ibid., pp.131-134

Based on the sufficiency of Scripture, there is no need for any further divine revelation. This means that the revelatory spiritual gifts like prophecy, a word of wisdom or even tongues were no longer needed once the NT was completed.

2. The Problem with Ongoing Revelation

It Undermines God's Character

According to Grudem's implications, if special revelation or communication from God is ongoing, it does not have God's authority, nor is it required to be believed or obeyed. Since it's unnecessary and could be erroneous, it is hard to see how such 'revelation' is helpful! More than this, how can such communication be attributed to God without detracting from his character? God, by definition, is the best communicator ever. In Scripture, God always communicated clearly. No one was ever left wondering if or what God had spoken. Yet today, evangelicals tell us, God talks mysteriously in a 'still small voice', or via a fallible prophet who mixes truth with error, or via a set of circumstances or an inner feeling! When God communicates, there is no doubt and no error. Therefore, the idea of ongoing, fallible revelation undermines God's character as a clear communicator of truth.

It Undermines the Sufficiency of Scripture

If it is true that God is still communicating with believers today, then divine revelation is ongoing. The purpose for such revelation is supposedly encouragement, guidance, wisdom and alike. However, the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture teaches that in the Bible, we have all the divine revelation we need to be encouraged, guided and wise. It's hard to see, therefore, how ongoing revelation doesn't undermine the sufficiency of Scripture.

It Undermines Truth

More than this, how can anyone validate ongoing revelation? Who gets to determine if, what and how God has communicated to whom? For many modern evangelicals, living as we do in an individualistic, self-absorbed, experience-oriented culture, the answer is obvious – the individual gets to decide. And as long as the experience of the communication does not seem to contradict anything in Scripture from that individual's perspective, it's a big thumbs up.

Yet there is simply no way to confirm the communication (be it a nudge, a prompting, a prophecy, a word, guidance etc.) was from God.

- To say validation is subjective (a spirit of peace etc.) is not helpful. All you've done is introduce another experience that needs validation. With subjective validation, you're really saying, "Trust me, I have the subjective ability to discern experiential truth". We need to learn from history the danger of this approach.
- To say validation is not necessary is to misunderstand Truth. Truth is that which accords with reality. Validation is the process by which truth is confirmed. So, to be assessed as true, an interpretation of Scripture, a quotation of statistics, or a scientific claim all need to be validated. This is why Scripture calls people to test the prophets and beware of false teachers. God wants his people to know truth from error; to do that, they need to validate what is communicated. To dismiss the need to validate experiences or revelations supposedly from God is to be naïve at best and reckless at worst.

VI. A Little Pentecostal and Charismatic History

The modern Pentecostal and Charismatic movement is traced back to John Wesley, who was impacted by the Pietistic Movement, which started in the 17th century.

Influences on the Pentecostal Movement

Figure/Movement	Date	Significance
Pietism	17 th century	Reacted to formalism and intellectualism in the Lutheran church. Stressed the need for Bible study and personal religious experience
John Wesley and Methodism	18 th century	Impacted by pietism, it taught the idea of entire sanctification or 'perfection'. The idea is that the believer strives for and can attain a high degree of holiness.
Holiness and Keswick Movements	19 th century	Movements emphasised and developed Wesley's 'deeper life' and holiness teaching. They popularised the idea of a religious experience known as 'entire surrender,' an experience that led to greater sanctification.

These movements stressed the need for holiness and deeper 'intimacy' with God.

The Pentecostal movement began from those influenced by the Holiness and Keswick Movements. They were also influenced by various 19th-century 'restoration' movements, which emphasised the need to restore the church to its first-century practice and power. There were two significant theological shifts from the Holiness Movement to the Pentecostal movement: (1) a move from being Christocentric to Spirit-centric³⁵ and (2) a move from a focus on purity to power.³⁶

Pentecostal historian Donald Dayton proposed this basic idea when he wrote,

"The rise of the healing doctrines was largely a radicalization of the perfectionist push of the Holiness teachings." [Theological Roots of Pentecostalism, p.136] Certain Holiness teachers seemed to have developed this emphasis that seems to have started with the doctrine of "entire sanctification" and led them to "complete bodily healing," both provided for in Christ's atonement and both instantly received and retained by faith.³⁷

³⁵ See O'Loughlin location 761f of 6758

³⁶ Ibid. location 882f of 6758

³⁷ Ibid, location 1055-1066 of 6758

Rise of the Pentecostal Movement

Figure/Movement	Date	Significance
Charles Parham	1901	First to popularise 'speaking in tongues' Taught that 'tongues' were evidence of Spirit Baptism Founded 1 st Pentecostal denomination
William Seymour	1906-09	Oversaw the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, effectively putting Pentecostalism on the Protestant Church map. All the spiritual gifts were allegedly in operation during the revival. Believed God was restoring the gifts to the church to help them reach the world with the Gospel and bring about a global revival. ³⁸
Pentecostal Denominations³⁹		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Between 1906-2000, 740 clear-cut denominations in 225 countries, with 66 million people - 240 were Wesleyan-Holiness teaching three works of grace, e.g. Church of God - 390 baptistic with two works of grace, AOG (1914) the biggest; - Oneness Pentecostals (1913), one work of grace, no Trinity - Apostolic Pentecostals (1906)

Parham and others believed at first that their tongues were actually foreign languages⁴⁰. The definition changed to ecstatic utterances when it became apparent, they were not speaking known human languages. This fact alone should cause believers to question the validity of what passes for tongues today.

“Parham recalled that: “In December of 1900 we had had our examination upon the subject of repentance, conversion, consecration, sanctification, healing and the soon coming of the Lord. We had reached in our studies a problem. What about the 2nd Chapter of Acts? I had felt for years that any missionary going to the foreign field should preach in the language of the natives. That if God had ever equipped His ministers in that way He could do it today. That if Balaam’s mule could stop in the middle of the road and give the first preacher that went out for money a “bawling out” in Arabic that anybody today ought to be able to preach in any language of the world if they had horse sense enough to let God use their tongue and throat. But still I believed our experience should tally exactly with the Bible, and neither sanctification nor the anointing that abideth taught by Stephen Merritt and others tallied with the

³⁸ O’Loughlin, location 1385 of 6758

³⁹ Ibid, location 1426f of 6758

⁴⁰ See O’Loughlin, quoting Parham’s autobiography, pp.51-54, location 1289 Of 6758. Parham believed his first experience of tongues was Swedish!

2nd Chapter of Acts. Having heard so many different religious bodies claim different proofs as the evidence of having the Pentecostal baptism, I set the students at work studying out diligently what was the Bible evidence of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, that we might go before the world with something that was indisputable because it tallied absolutely with the Word”⁴¹.

“Virtually all Pentecostal leaders, before 1908, believed that their tongues were actual foreign languages.[Gary McGee, Initial Evidence p.786]...For example, upon attending the Azusa Street Mission, A. G. Garr, a Baptist pastor, received his BHS [Baptism of the Holy Spirit] experience with tongues in June 1906. Shortly after that, Garr felt called to go to India as a missionary, believing that tongues-speaking had equipped him to minister in unlearned foreign languages. He arrived in Calcutta, India, at the beginning of 1907 and attempted to implement the missionary use of tongues, but that venture failed. Yet, unlike other early Pentecostal missionaries who returned home in disillusionment, Garr persevered in his overseas Oriental ministry through making use of an interpreter and the study of the necessary languages.”⁴²

The Rise of the Charismatic Movement

O’Loughlin posits five reasons why Pentecostal theology so successfully and thoroughly penetrated every mainline denomination and the Roman Catholic Church⁴³:

1. Exponential growth
2. Economic prosperity of American Pentecostals, which gave them credibility with middle-class evangelical America
3. The ‘Success’ and popularity of Pentecostal faith healers via media (radio & TV)
4. The influence of the Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International
5. The ecumenical work of David de Plessis

The Charismatic Movement is dated to the Spring of 1959 when a Californian Episcopalian Priest, Dennis Bennet, declared he’d been baptised in the Spirit and spoke in tongues⁴⁴. He was not stood down, thus marking the beginning of the neo-Pentecostal movement or the Charismatic movement (the 2nd wave).

The ecumenical nature of the Charismatic movement is concerning. As Thomas Edgar puts it:

“...People within these movements claim to be in direct contact with the Holy Spirit, to have all the gifts described in the New Testament, and to communicate [back and forth] directly with God, yet they include Roman Catholics, fundamentalists, liberal Protestants, amillennialists, premillennialists, Calvinists, Arminians, noninspirationists, and even those who reject salvation by faith. Ironically, the Spirit with whom they claim to be in direct contact does not seem to be at all concerned to correct these differences, some of which are incorrect and many of which amount to crucial differences. For some inexplicable reason even their alleged contact with the supernatural has failed to correct such basic errors....”⁴⁵

⁴¹ *ibid.*, location 1240 of 6758 quoted from The Life of Charles F. Parhem, autobiography, pp.51-52

⁴² *ibid.*, locations 2363 and 2371 see also Burgess and McGee, pp.328-329, quoted from Synan, The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition, pp.101-102

⁴³ *ibid.*, Location 1534f of 6758

⁴⁴ Burgess and McGee, Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, p.53

⁴⁵ Thomas Edgar, satisfied by the Spirit, p.249

The Waves of Pentecostalism ⁴⁶				
Wave	Date	Key Figures	Differences	Fruit
1 st - Pentecostalism	1901 1906	Charles Parham William Seymour	Tongues as evidence of Spirit Baptism	Pentecostal denominations like AOG, Church of God, Four Square etc.
2 nd – Charismatic	1960	Dennis Bennett The Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship	- stayed in historic denominations (including Roman Catholic Church) - mostly middle class (thus emphasized ‘inner’ healing) - more ecumenical than Pentecostals	Jesus People Calvary Chapel Word of Faith Maranatha Music
3 rd – Signs and wonders	1980s	John Wimber Peter Wagner Jack Deere Wayne Grudem	- No second blessing - no special emphasis on tongues; healing was the primary feature - open to various ‘forms’ of church	Vineyard Movement
4 th -?	?	?	- Calls to combine all previous waves - focuses on societal change by impacting religion, government, education, business, family, media, art and entertainment ⁴⁷ - expectation of a coming worldwide revival	?

Pause for Thought

The following elements from the history of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements are troubling and should give every believer pause for thought before embracing their teaching:

1. The shift in focus from purity to power⁴⁸ and from Christ to the Spirit⁴⁹
2. The shift in the definition of tongues when discovered they weren’t human languages
3. The teaching of a second or third blessing and that tongues are the initial evidence for such
4. The ecumenical nature of the Charismatic movement, embracing many groups with serious doctrinal deviation from a conservative evangelical perspective⁵⁰

⁴⁶ John Lyons, The Fourth Wave and the Approaching Millennium: Some Problems with Charismatic Hermeneutics

⁴⁷ <https://godencounters.com/start-fourth-wave/> written 2012, accessed 26/1/22

⁴⁸ I understand Acts 1:8 talks about receiving power from the Spirit to be Gospel witnesses worldwide. However, Wesley and co stressed that believers have the power of God to live pure and courageous lives and so witness to the truth of the Gospel. The Pentecostals and Charismatics have shifted that focus. While not denying the former, it seems to me they stress that believers have the ability to display the power of God through supernatural acts.

⁴⁹ Among other things the Spirit’s role is to glorify Christ (John 16:13-14). He is not here to draw attention to himself but to see Christ glorified through the conviction of sinners and the transformation of believers.

⁵⁰ I believe the Charismatic movement has been the classic “Trojan Horse” for modern Christianity. Doctrines that were rightly eschewed for centuries have now been adopted, often uncritically, by the mainstream evangelical world. This has seen a shift from word-based faith to experience-based faith, thus undermining the foundation of the faith. In addition, the ecumenical fruit of the movement is alarming, to say the least. Uniting

4. The rise of the health, wealth and prosperity movement, along with other equally doctrinally deviant offshoots (like the Word of Faith Movement)

VII. Continuationist Logic (from a Cessationist perspective⁵¹)

1. We see supernatural gifts in the NT
2. We expect and seek the NT gifts today
3. What we seek, see and experience today doesn't match what we see in the NT (the gifts are not obviously supernatural)
4. We redefine the NT gifts to make them fit with what we see today
5. These new definitions of the gifts allow cessationist arguments to be rejected

Conclusion

What Charismatics claim to be supernatural spiritual gifts do not match what we see in the NT. Are there any good biblical, theological and historical reasons that might account for the absence of the NT supernatural gifts in the church today and the claims made by the Charismatics? I believe there are. The uniqueness of the Apostolic Age, the Jewish rejection of the kingdom offer and their subsequent judgment, the completion of Scripture and the testimony of history provide a solid rationale to support the claim that the supernatural gifts have ceased.

I'll let Thomas Edgar have the last word:

“...they leave for us a Holy Spirit who presumably distributes defective or deficient gifts to men. The New Testament gift of prophecy for example, is a lesser gift no matter how much faith or desire the New Testament prophet may have. This seems to be a far less marvellous working of the Holy Spirit than any described in Scripture. This is not all. We are also left with a whole order of deficient gifts...

...The New Testament prophets are fallible, cannot be trusted, and are no more than any teacher or counsellor, even when speaking by revelation. The miracle workers and healings can often fail but still originate from God. We are confronted with healings of ‘personality meltdown’ as well as ‘demons’ of depression and allergies. Finally we are left with a ‘gift’ of making unintelligible sounds rather than a miraculous and marvellous ability from the Holy Spirit to speak actual languages for the benefit of others.

The unique nature of the apostolic age is abandoned, and we are informed that the church of that time had all of these weak and inefficient gifts...Ultimately, if we accept all of this, we have paid a terrible price only to justify someone's personal experiences.

...We maintain that we are asked to surrender too much that is important, if not essential. The price we must pay for this experience is entirely too high.⁵²”

around the interpretation of experience rather than doctrine has seen the evangelical world seriously compromised.

⁵¹ Though, as has been established, this was clearly the logic of at least the early Pentecostals

⁵² Thomas Edgar, *Satisfied by the Spirit*, p.248-249

Chapter 3: The Gift of Apostleship

I. The Definition of the Gift of Apostleship

II. Qualifications of an Apostle

1. An eyewitness of the Lord
2. Accompanied Jesus during his ministry
3. Signs and Wonders (2 Cor 12:12)

III. Activities of an Apostle

IV. The Uniqueness of the (12) Apostles

V. Responses to Arguments That Apostleship was not a Gift,

1. The term 'gift' never applied to Apostleship
2. The list in 1 Cor 12:28 is a list of ministries not gifts
3. It's impossible to define what the gift of Apostle was
4. Other besides the 13 were Apostles, so not unique
5. Today some could still be apostles, so it hasn't ceased
6. It would be the only gift with qualifying criteria
7. How could the Corinthians 'seek' Apostleship?!
8. Church planters and missionaries are modern Apostles

I. The Definition of the Gift of Apostleship

"The word apostle means a sent one only in the sense of a representative of God sent to people.⁵³" In the NT, it seems to have a formal and informal use. Formally it refers to the twelve plus Paul; informally, it is used for other representatives of God.

II. Qualifications of an Apostle

1. An eyewitness of the Lord
2. Accompanied Jesus during his ministry
3. Signs and Wonders (2 Cor 12:12)

III. Activities of an Apostle

1. Taught doctrine (Acts 2:42)
2. Responsible for the spread of the Gospel to different regions (Acts 1:8, 8, 9, 10)
3. Performed miracles (Acts 5:12; 2 Cor 12:11)
4. Had authority in and over the church (Acts 2:42; 4:35-5:11; 6:2-6; 9:27)

IV. The Uniqueness of the (13) Apostles

1. Acts 1 indicates there were only twelve, and then Paul was added.
2. The church was founded upon the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20)
3. They worked signs, wonders, and miracles (2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4).
4. They had God-given authority (Matt 16:19, Acts 16:4, 1 Cor 14:37-38)
5. They will be on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28)

⁵³ Thomas Edgar, Satisfied by the Spirit, p.43

6. They will have their 12 names on the heavenly city (Rev 21:14)

'gifted' apostles (Formal)	Others of whom the word is used (informal)
The Twelve (Matt 10:2) – Judas (Acts 1:20) + Matthias (Acts 1:26) + Paul (Gal 1:11-12)	- Barnabas (Acts 14:14) - James (Gal 1:19) - Silas (1 Thess 2:7) - Timothy (1 Thes 2:7) - Adronicus (Rom 16:7) - Junias (Rom 16:7) - "our brothers" (2 Cor 8:23) - Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25)
Unique Acts 1:21, 26 Matt 19:28 Rev 22:14	- Called apostles due to their association with the apostles - The word is used to mean 'representatives.'

V. Responses to Arguments that Apostleship was not a Gift but a Ministry

1. The term 'gift' (charismata) is never applied to Apostleship.

Response

First, the word 'charismata' (gift) is not a technical term for a spiritual gift. The word is used in a variety of ways⁵⁴. Nor does it make sense to argue that something is only a spiritual gift if 'charismata' is used with it. Second, Paul lists apostleship with other spiritual gifts without any qualification.

2. The first three items of the list in 1 Cor 12:28 refer to ministries, not gifts. They are the only ones Paul numbered and the only ones that refer specifically to people. This marks them as different, referring to ministries, not gifts.

Response

Apostles are followed in v.28 by prophets and teachers, both of whom are gifted individuals. The implication is that apostles are gifted individuals too. This is especially so given that spiritual gifts are the context of the chapter.

3. It's impossible to define what the gift of Apostle was. This is in contrast to the other gifts that are called by what they are.

Response

First, we have more information on apostleship than most other gifts. It was a combination of supernatural gifts and God-given authority over the churches. Second, we simply don't know what most of the other gifts entailed, especially the so-called 'non-supernatural' ones. In fact, the only ones we can define with any accuracy, given the NT evidence, are apostleship, prophecy, tongues, miracles and healings.

⁵⁴ See Kenneth Berding, What Are Spiritual Gifts, chapters 5-6. To show the word is not a technical term for gifts he gives the range of meaning for charismata outside of 1 Corinthians 12 which includes God's saving grace, rescue from danger, the privileges of Israel, eternal life and the calling to celibacy.

4. Others besides the 13 were Apostles, so they were not unique.

Response

It is very clear from the NT that there were only 13 Apostles (including Paul). The word 'apostle' was used in a formal and informal sense.

5. Some could still be apostles today, so the gift hasn't ceased.

Response

People today cannot meet the requirements of being an apostle, which include the gifts of signs and wonders, having accompanied Jesus during his earthly ministry and being a witness to his resurrection.

6. Apostleship, if it were a gift, would be the only one with qualifying criteria

Response

So? The Apostles were uniquely gifted men (the 12 + Paul) serving in a unique time (the apostolic age) for a unique purpose (to lay the foundation of the church). Nothing in the doctrine of spiritual gifts rules out a gift having qualifying criteria.

7. The Corinthians were told to seek the greater gifts. If Apostleship was a gift, it was the greatest. But given the qualifying criteria, how could they seek it?!

Response

Seeking the gifts was covered in the introduction to this topic. To recap briefly:

- Paul's admonition is primarily a call to the Corinthians to value prophecy over tongues;
- The word charismatics take as 'seek' in 1 Cor 12-14 is better translated as 'be zealous', therefore refers to an attitude rather than an action;
- The word is plural, calling the church to value the exercise of the greater gifts in their midst, not to individuals to ask for gifts.

8. Church planters and missionaries are modern Apostles.

Response

There is no NT warrant for such a definition. If what people call an Apostle today does not match the NT evidence, it is not the NT gift.

Conclusion

Charismatics reveal too much in trying to redefine Apostleship or exclude it as a gift. The reason appears to be straightforward. Apostleship is one gift that has ceased. If true, then the principle of cessationism is valid. Everyone who believes apostleship has ceased is a partial cessationist. More than this, if one gift can cease in this age, so can others. It doesn't prove other gifts have ceased, but it opens the door to the possibility.

Chapter 4: The Spiritual Gifts of Miracles and Healing

I. The Definition of the Gifts of Miracles and Healings

II. The Nature of N.T. Miracles and Healings

- 1. Always Successful**
- 2. Immediate**
- 3. Most often done in public before unbelievers**
- 4. Robust (no relapses)**

III. The Purpose of NT Miracles and Healings

- 1. To glorify God**
- 2. To validate the messenger and his message**
- 2. To validate the offer of the Kingdom to Israel**
- 3. To edify the church**

IV. The Cessation of the Spiritual Gifts of Miracles and Healings

- 1. The passing of the Apostolic Age**
- 2. Israel's rejection of Messiah**

V. Responses to Arguments for the Continuation of These Gifts

- 1. Continuity between Jesus' ministry and ours**
- 2. The gift of miracles was common, not Apostles only**
- 3. Healers are under God's sovereignty so not always successful**
- 4. Miracles and the (present) Kingdom of God**

VI. Let's Get Real

I. The Definition of the Gifts of Miracles and Healings

The spiritual gift of miracles was the supernatural, God-given ability to do the miraculous. Likewise, the spiritual gift of healing was the supernatural, God-given ability to heal people of any ailment successfully.

This definition of miracles from Norm Geisler should help us discern the legitimacy of 'miracle' claims today:

"Miracle will be defined here in a biblical sense as a special act of God in the world, a supernatural interference into nature, a special divine intervention. A miracle is not simply an extraordinary event but one that would not have occurred without special divine intervention.⁵⁵"

Geisler goes on to categorise the types of miracles seen in the Bible: raising the dead (John 11:43-44), power over non-human nature (Matthew 8:26), and power over all kinds of

⁵⁵ Geisler, Norman L.. SIGNS AND WONDERS: HEALINGS, MIRACLES, AND UNUSUAL EVENTS (p. 15). Bastion Books. Kindle Edition.

diseases (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 10:1)⁵⁶. He further differentiates miracles from other phenomenon in this helpful table⁵⁷:

	<i>Description</i>	<i>Power</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Traits</i>
<i>Anomaly</i>	Freaks of nature	physical	Bumblebee	Natural event, has a pattern
<i>Magic</i>	Deception, fooling	human	Rabbit out of a hat	Unnatural, man controlled
<i>Psychosomatic</i>	Mind over matter	mental	Psychosomatic cures	Requires faith, can fail, some sickness
<i>Demonic</i>	Evil powers	supernormal	Demonic influences	Evil, falsehood, occult, limited
<i>Providential</i>	Prearranged events	Divine	Fog at Normandy	Naturally explained, spiritual context
<i>Miracle</i>	Divine act	supernatural	Raising the dead	Never fails, immediate, lasts, brings glory to God

This table shows that when unusual events happen, they can be explained in several possible ways.

II. The Nature of N.T. Miracles and Healings

A look at the miraculous ministry of Jesus and the Apostles leads to the following understanding of this spiritual gift:

1. Always successful: there is no record of gifted people attempting healings that were not successful.
2. Immediate: The results were immediate when a gifted person performed a healing or miracle.
3. For unbelievers: healings and miracles were most often done in public before unbelievers. Miracles and healings done within the church are comparatively rare.
4. Robust: When healing takes place, there is no recorded relapse soon afterwards.

“There are no exceptions to this pattern...These characteristics provide a framework upon which we can build biblical understanding of the supernatural⁵⁸.”

III. The Purpose of NT Miracles and Healings

1. To glorify God

“...a true miracle manifests the good moral character of God. True miracles are visible acts that reveal the invisible and impeccable nature of God (Matt. 14:14-20; Luke 6:6-10; Acts 10:38; 1 Cor. 12:7). One general purpose of all that God does, including miracles, is to produce and promote good and virtue in the natural world (Ps. 119:68; Matt. 12:12-13; John 10:32; Rom. 8:28; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Tim. 4:4; James 1:17). Even

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp.16-20

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.48

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 25-26

miracles of divine judgement are good, for they reveal God's justice toward sin and evil. Satanic counterfeit miracles, by contrast, are associated with evil, immorality, and manipulation of some kind (Gen. 3:1-6; Deut. 18:9-13; 1 Sam. 15: 23; Acts 8:9-11, 18-23; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; 1 Tim. 4:1-3)⁵⁹."

"A true miracle always brings glory to God" (Exod. 14:4; John 2:11; 11:4; 12:37-41; 14:13; 17:4; Acts 3:12-13). Satanic pseudo-miracles, by contrast, glorify and call attention to created beings (i.e., angels or men) instead of the Creator (Acts 8:9-11). The overall purpose of true miracles is to glorify God, unlike pseudo-miracles and magic tricks which are used to entertain (Luke 23:8) and as a means of personal profit (Acts 16:16). True miracles glorify and point attention to the Creator, not to finite creatures⁶⁰.

2. To validate the messenger and his message (Acts 2:22, Hebrews 2:3-4).

"...a true miracle directly or indirectly verifies truth claims. True miracles confirm that both the message and the messenger are from God (Exod. 4:1-17; 1 Kings 18:16-39; John 3:2; 10:24-25, 37-38; Acts 2:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). Since God alone has the power to perform miracles, it stands to reason that if God wanted to certify His message and messengers of new revelation, then He would give them credentials that only He could give, namely, miracles. A true miracle, therefore, is always associated with God's revealed truth. Satanic pseudo-miracles, by contrast, are associated with error, deception, false teaching, and occult practices (Gen. 3:1-4, 14; Deut. 18:10-11; Acts 8:9-11; 13:6-10; 16:16-18; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; 1 Tim. 4:1). A true prophet, for example, never gives false prophecies or contradicts the truth that God has already revealed (Deut. 13:1-5; 18:21-22; Isa. 8:19-20; Jer. 28:9)⁶¹."

"Miraculous signs and wonders were performed by individuals in the Bible as a testimony and as evidence that they had been sent by God. The miraculous works confirmed the claims they each made to be messengers of God. Hebrews 2:3-4 states unequivocally that "this salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." Just as the old covenant was "binding" when confirmed by miracles through Moses, even so, the message of Christ and the apostles was officially confirmed through their miracles. God's servants are confirmed by God's signs. His messengers are confirmed by His miracles⁶²."

Mark 2:10-12 provides a great example of this. To prove that he had authority to forgive sins (a truth claim), Jesus healed a paralytic. 1 Kings 18:36-40 likewise. After Elijah prayed, 'let it be known O Lord that you are God' (a truth claim), fire from heaven consumed the sacrifices. And in Acts 4:27-31, signs and wonders are linked to the preaching of the Word (a truth claim), as in Romans 15:18-19.

⁵⁹ O'Loughlin, James. The Truth about Speaking in Tongues, Kindle Edition. Location 4143/6758

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, location 4168/6758

⁶¹ *ibid.*, location 4160-4168/6758

⁶² Geisler, Norman L.. SIGNS AND WONDERS: HEALINGS, MIRACLES, AND UNUSUAL EVENTS (p. 25). Bastion Books. Kindle Edition.

3. To validate the offer of the Kingdom to Israel (Acts 2-3)

When Peter preached to the Jews in Acts 2, he validated Christ as their Messiah, whom they crucified (2:23). How could they know that Christ was the Messiah? “

“Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22)

In this sermon, Peter convinced his Jewish audience of Jesus’ divine personhood, Messianic credentials, death, resurrection and ascension. The sermon culminated with the marvellous cry, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36). As this verse reveals, Peter was speaking to the nation of Israel, and calling on them to repent.

When Peter next preached to the Jews in Acts 3, on the back of a miraculous healing that served to validate his message, he invited the nation to repent so that God might restore the kingdom to Israel.

“¹² Men of Israel...¹⁹repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; ²⁰and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, ²¹whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.” (Acts 2:12-21 NASB)

The return of Jesus to establish the oft prophesied, restored kingdom of Israel is dependent on the national repentance of Israel. According to these verses, not only will their repentance see their sins washed away, but it will also see Christ return and the ‘restoration of all things’ as per the prophets. This is when ‘all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:25-27 cf. Ezekiel 36-48, Zechariah 12-14 etc.). This is the same kingdom Jesus taught the Apostles about for 40 days after his resurrection, which the Apostles hoped he would restore (key word!) to Israel soon (Acts1:3-8).

All to say that the miracles of Jesus and the Apostles, at least in the early chapters of Acts, gave credibility not only to the person and work of Jesus but to call for the nation to repent so that Jesus might return from heaven and bring in the Davidic kingdom.⁶³

4. To edify the church (1 Corinthians 12:7). This was a common purpose for all spiritual gifts. However, this does not mean the gifts of miracles and healings were primarily for believers or principally exercised within the church. The reality, as per the Gospels and Acts, was very different. The church was edified as these spiritual gifts were used to bring glory to God as the men testified to his truth before a lost world.

IV. The Cessation of the Spiritual Gifts of Miracles and Healings

1. The signs and wonders accompanying Jesus and the Apostles were unique to that time.

“The greatest problem with the continuationist’s discussion of the gift of healing (and other miraculous gifts as well) is the unqualified use of Jesus’ ministry of healing...The

⁶³ See Michael J. Vlach, *The Relationship between Israel’s Repentance and the Kingdom of God*, Article available online at <https://www.pre-trib.org/pretribfiles/pdfs/Vlach-TheRelationshipBetweenIsraelsRepentance.pdf>

suggestion that God would respond to our compassionate prayers and glorify himself through healings even as he did through Jesus is to completely disregard the significance of Jesus' healings as 'sign' miracles. While the Gospels do make frequent references to the compassion of Jesus in relation to his healing, the overriding biblical emphasis is on these miraculous acts as 'signs' to authenticate him as a messenger from God (cf. John 20:30-31; Acts 2:22)⁶⁴.

Additional evidence includes:

- 2 Corinthians 12:12, "The signs of an apostle were performed among you in all patience with signs, and wonders and mighty works." If signs and wonders were common, how did they function as apostolic signs? If they are closely tied to the Apostles, then when the Apostles passed off the scene, so did the miraculous gifts.

- Hebrews 2:3-4, "It was declared first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will." The writer to the Hebrews assigns signs and wonders to the past, to a former generation.

- The nature and extent of miracles performed by men in the Apostolic Age are unique compared to the rest of church history.

"The miracles described in the book of Acts are of a magnitude never seen since that time in church history...The huge crowds who were healed and the quality and immediate nature of the healing have not been repeated...Today we do not see erring church members die at the word of an apostle (5:5-10), nor do we see opponents blinded by the word of a miracle worker (13:11-12).⁶⁵"

2. The signs and wonders are closely connected to the preaching of the coming millennial kingdom offered to Israel. When Israel rejected this offer and was subsequently judged (AD 70), there was no further need for the miracles.

3. Church instructions for healing did not mention using anyone with the spiritual gift. James 5:14-16 says:

"¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." (James 5:14-16, NASB)

There are several fascinating implications this passage has concerning the spiritual gift of healing in the first century:

- The sick person was not to call for a person with the gift of healing; why?
- The Elders, their prayer and their faith are said to be the means for any healing.

⁶⁴ Robert Saucy, Are Miraculous Gifts For Today? Four Views, pp. 232-233

⁶⁵ Thomas Edgar, Satisfied By the Presence of the Spirit, p.87

- The healing is not said to depend on the sick man's faith.

Edgar summarises the findings:

"It is impossible to reconcile James 5:14-16 with the opinion that individuals with the gift of healing were common in the early church or are present today. We can explain this passage in two possible ways: (1) the gift of healing was no longer given to the church when James was written; or (2) the gift of healing was not exercised toward church members but was reserved for ministry towards unbelievers to confirm the Gospel among them..."⁶⁶

4. The nature of the claims of miracles and healings today are of a different, lesser order than those in the NT.

"Dr William A. Nolen, Chief of Surgery at Meeker County Hospital, Litchfield, Minnesota, has spent many years investigating claims of supernatural healing and has even travelled to the Philippines to investigate such claims. He claims that

... when evangelical healers dramatically call on God to transmit His power through them to cure their patients' diseases, they are using the power of suggestion in the hope that it will so affect the patient's malfunctioning autonomic nervous system (the system that regulates such functions as digestion, heart rate, blood pressure, etc.) that the disease or symptoms caused by the derangement of that system will be cured. (Abell 1981, 193–194)."⁶⁷

V. Responses to Arguments for the Continuation of These Gifts

1. Continuity between Jesus' ministry and ours

This argument takes a couple of forms. First, some believe that Jesus introduced the Messianic Kingdom when he came. Signs and wonders are connected to that kingdom; since the kingdom didn't leave when Jesus did, we should expect signs and wonders in this age. Here is Pentecostal teacher Michael Brown's take on miracles and the kingdom of God:

"Do you see this important connection between the kingdom of God and healing? Wherever the kingdom (= rule) of God drew near, Satan's domain was broken, as light overcame darkness, captives were delivered, the sick were healed, and demons were driven out. Note again the words of Jesus just cited: The apostles were to announce the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God and then heal the sick and drive out demons. Or, in reverse order in Luke 10:8–9 with reference to the seventy He sent out: "Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'"...The point of all this is simple: These miracles were not just impersonal acts of power announcing the inbreaking of the Messianic kingdom, like trumpets announcing the approach of royalty. They were signs—meaning indicators—of the inbreaking of the Messianic kingdom. This is what happens when the rule of God arrives! And since the Messianic kingdom did not leave the earth when Jesus ascended to heaven (where

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.89-90

⁶⁷ Geisler, Norman L.. *SIGNS AND WONDERS: HEALINGS, MIRACLES, AND UNUSUAL EVENTS* (p. 12). Bastion Books. Kindle Edition.

does the Bible say it did?), there is every reason we should expect to see the continuance of these miracles as the kingdom of God spreads around the earth, culminating with its full manifestation when Jesus returns.⁶⁸

Fred Butler explains the background to Brown's thinking:

Brown takes his understanding of the Kingdom of God from George Ladd, who wrote a number of books advocating what is called an "already/not yet" view of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is set into motion with Christ taking the Davidic throne, but it is not yet all here until His Second Coming. The late John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, took Ladd's "already/not yet" view of the Kingdom and added the element of signs and wonders to it. Because the Kingdom of God is already here with the inauguration of Christ's death and Resurrection, and His being elevated to the Davidic throne, the miracles of the Kingdom are bestowed upon those who come under the rule of Jesus⁶⁹.

John Piper would seem to agree with Brown, arguing something similar from Acts 2. He believes tongues and prophecy were a sign of the new age, the last days. Given we're still in the last days, the gifts are still here. In addition, Piper argues that Luke 9:2; 10:9, and Matthew 24:14 link miracles with the preaching of the kingdom. If the kingdom is here now and the message is to be preached till the end comes (Matt 24:14), miracles and healings should be expected to accompany the message.

A second form of this argument is that the NT shows we must imitate Jesus and the Apostles, including spiritual gifts and abilities. After all, didn't Jesus tell his followers that they would do greater things than him (John 14:12)? Didn't he say if you had faith as a mustard seed, you'd move mountains (Matthew 17:20)? Didn't he promise that whatever you ask in my name will be done for you (John 14:13)? Then, of course, the Apostle Paul was constantly telling believers to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 4:9). Surely this would include his supernatural ministry, especially since it was modelled after Christ's.

Response:

First of all, yes, there is a connection between miracles and the kingdom of God. However, the Messianic kingdom has not come, nor has it been inaugurated. When Jesus ascended to heaven, he sat on his Father's throne (Rev 3:21), not the throne of David. In the OT, the throne of David was geopolitical. There is nothing in Scripture to indicate this has changed. When Jesus returns, he will return to sit on David's throne and usher in the Messianic Kingdom, till then we earnestly wait, work and pray for the kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10, 19:27-30; Rev 2:26; 3:21). Indeed, the book of Matthew can be understood as answering the common objection of the Jews on this matter, 'If the King has come, where is the kingdom?' Charismatics would want to answer this by saying, 'the kingdom is here spiritually and here are the signs and wonders to prove it.' Unfortunately, the nature of their so-called signs and wonders proves the opposite. The correct answer to the objection is, 'the King came, your ancestors rejected him, but even now if your nation will repent, he will return and bring the kingdom with him (cf. Peter's sermon in Acts 3). All to say that the kingdom is not here, nor are the signs and wonders connected with it.

⁶⁸ Brown, Michael L.. Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire (pp. 174-176). Charisma House. Kindle Edition.

⁶⁹ Fred Butler <https://hipandthigh.wordpress.com/2014/02/26/authentic-fire-chapter-6-review/> 4/1/22

The passages in question must be examined in context regarding the second argument. If they meant what charismatics claim, then the Apostolic age ought not to have been unique. Razzle dazzle miracles should have characterised the church throughout the ages into our modern period. They simply have not and do not. The passages so often cited need to be understood in context. They are a call to extraordinary faith in Jesus. A faith that will help to shape our character and will so that we reflect Jesus well. Concerning Paul, he desired believers to imitate his character and zeal, as the context bears out.

2. The gift of miracles was common in the first century, just as it is now

Philip, Stephen and Barnabas, non-apostles, did miracles, as also the Galatians (3:5) and Corinthians (1 Cor 1:7; 12). This means gifts of miracles and healing were commonplace and not restricted to the Apostles only.

Response Regarding Philip, Steven and Barnabas

God used Stephen and Philip at significant junctures in salvation history. Stephen was the last to testify of God's grace to the Jews before the Gospel went beyond Jerusalem (Acts 6-7). Like the prophets of old, he answered Jewish objections to Christ and called out their hardness of heart. Signs and wonders validated his 'apostolic' like message and ministry.

Philip was the first to take the Gospel to non-Jews, the Samaritans. This was a seismic shift in the history of redemption. How would new Jewish converts be able to come to terms with Samaritans being included in the church? Philip's signs and wonders helped validate this new, extraordinary (from a historical perspective) development (Acts 8).

Barnabas accompanied the Apostle Paul on his first mission trip. They are together mentioned as performing signs and wonders in Iconium (Acts 14:3). In context, the focus is on Paul's miracle-working ability (Acts 13:8-12 and 14:8-11). Barnabas, it would seem, was given these supernatural abilities as a co-worker of Paul. Like Philip, this first ministry journey was the first foray of the Gospel into new territory as it were (cf. Acts 1:8, the third and broadest region – the uttermost parts of the earth). So again, the ministry of Paul and Barnabas was unique to salvation history and accompanied by signs and wonders for validation.

Regarding these three men and the gift of miracles, I contend that Luke, in the book of Acts, is recording the exceptional 'acts of the Holy Spirit'. Luke is not giving us a picture of 'normal' local church life. This we get from the Epistles. Therefore, I suggest the miracle-working ability of Stephen, Philip and Barnabas was part of the exceptional, not the standard, practice of first-century Christianity.

However, even if you reject this interpretation and believe these three prove the gift of miracles was commonplace in the church, look at the nature of the gift they exercised. What you will notice is a striking dissimilarity with what is claimed today:

- The signs and wonders were performed in public before unbelievers. Today they are, more often than not, 'performed' behind closed doors for believers mainly.
- The signs and wonders were irrefutable miracles and healings. Today, many, if not most, of the so-called 'signs and wonders' are questionable and difficult to verify.
- The signs and wonders resulted in people coming to faith (Acts 8:6 and 14; 13:12; 14:21). Today, there doesn't appear to be the same degree of genuine conversions emanating from the use of these 'gifts'.

- The healings were not dependent on the faith of those healed. Today, charismatics hide behind the need for 'faith' by the healer and/or the sick person as a recourse for failed healings.

So, in summary, the gifts of miracles exercised by Stephen, Philip and Barnabas help to show that 'this is not that,' that the NT gift was and is decidedly different from what is claimed today.

Response Regarding Galatians 3:5

Galatians 3:5 does not say who, how or even when the miracles occurred. It may be a reference to the Gospel first coming via the ministry of Paul.

Response Regarding 1 Corinthians 1:7 and 12:8-10 and 28-30

Edgar makes a couple of interpretive suggestions for 1 Corinthians 1:7⁷⁰:

1. they did not lack any gift typically received by church members (sign gifts excluded)
2. the Corinthians had received ministry from all the gifts (via the Apostles). Therefore the context says they had been enriched (passive) in all utterance and knowledge. Thus, the passage could mean they had received blessing from all the gifts and does not necessarily mean the Corinthians possessed every gift.

In addition, there is the following corroborating evidence that indicates this verse doesn't mean the Corinthians had every single spiritual gift possible:

- The gift of Apostle was limited to 13, and it is highly unlikely any were in Corinth. Thus the Corinthians didn't possess all the gifts listed in chapter 12, though they had been enriched by those who did.
- The sign gifts were predominantly restricted to the Apostles (2 Cor 12:12, Heb 2:3-4); thus, if there were no Apostles in Corinth, it's unlikely there was anyone with the gifts of miracles or healing;
- The Corinthians were being chastised for prizing and exhibiting the 'showy' gift of tongues more than they ought (in an unorderly and unhelpful fashion). Given miracles and healings were 'showier' than tongues; it seems unusual they are not mentioned as being used by the Corinthians outside the lists in chapter 12.
- James was written earlier than 1 Corinthians (probably before 49 AD) and taught how to handle sickness in the congregation. He doesn't mention calling for someone with the gift of healing as a strategy. The implication seems that 'healers' weren't common, even in the early church.

Response Regarding 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and 28-30

Simply because gifts are on the list does not mean the Corinthians possessed them. Apostleship is on the list, but no one believes any Corinthians possessed that gift. In context, Paul is arguing against the Corinthian's obsession and misuse of the gift of tongues. The lists in chapter 12, therefore, help serve as a corrective. Tongues is not only the least of the gifts, but apostleship (the gift which Paul has) is the greatest. Aside from apostleship, prophecy and teaching are the gifts to be valued most (v.28), and then miracles and healings (which resided mostly with the Apostles). The lists put the Corinthians back in their place concerning the gifts. They didn't have them all and depended on apostles like Paul for the ministry of the best gifts.

⁷⁰ Edgar, pp.96-98

3. Healers are under God's sovereignty so not always successful.

John Piper has come up with this convenient definition for the gift of healing, "Gifts of healing, therefore, are occasional and subject to the will of God."⁷¹ Most charismatics would agree with this definition and add that healings may also be subject to the faith of those involved. Piper offers this defence for his thinking:

"This is also supported by Paul's experience. Paul healed some (Acts 14:10, 16:18, 19:12, 20:9-10) but not others (2 Cor 12:8-9, Gal 4:13-14, 1 Tim 5:23, Philip 2:26-27, 2 Tim 4:20). According to 1 Cor 12:11, God "...is sovereign and can give or withhold a gift of healing whenever he deems best."⁷²

Response

(1) The obvious problem with this definition is that such a gift is nowhere to be found in the NT. It is never said that Paul tried and failed to heal himself or others. This is purely an argument from silence. Another way to explain the data is to say the gift of healing ceased even toward the end of Paul's life!

(2) Piper's definition is contrary to the nature of spiritual gifts. Certainly, the supernatural gifts of tongues and prophecy were under the recipient's control (1 Cor 14:26f). Surely, all the other gifts, like teaching or hospitality or giving and so on, were also under the believer's control. So why would the gifts of miracles and healing be different?

(3) Following from (2), what Piper describes is not a gift but an act of God in response to the prayers of his people. This is not the spiritual gift of healing seen in the N.T.

(4) Healings in the Bible were often not dependent on the recipient's faith.

"There are thirty-five miracles of Jesus recorded in the Gospels (see Appendix 1). Of these, faith of the recipient is only exercised in ten of them: Healing the lame man (John 5:1-9). Cleansing a leper (Matthew 8:2-4). Healing withered hand (Matthew 9:2-8). Healing man born blind (John 9:1-7). Healing blind Bartimaeus (Matthew 20:29-34). Healing the hemorrhaging woman (Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:24-34; Luke 8:43-48). Cleansing the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19). Peter walking on water (Matthew 14:24-33). First miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:1-11). Second miraculous catch of fish (John 21:1-11). In most of the cases where faith is present, it is not explicitly demanded as a condition for the miracle. Even in the few cases where faith is the condition for a miracle, it is probably faith in Jesus as Messiah that is required, not faith that the person could be healed. So, even here faith is not required in order to be healed. Faith is not necessary for the healing, even though it may accompany it. By contrast, the so-called faith movement today requires faith as a condition for the healing. Those who are not healed did not have enough faith. Those who get healed had faith. Faith becomes the psychological condition and conditioning for the healing."⁷³

"Sometimes Jesus performed miracles in spite of the unbelief of the people. The disciples lacked faith to cast the demon out of the boy (Matthew 17:14-21). Even the

⁷¹ Sam Storms, Four Views, p.213

⁷² John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/gifts-of-healings-and-workings-of-miracles> (4/12/21)

⁷³ Geisler, Norman L.. SIGNS AND WONDERS: HEALINGS, MIRACLES, AND UNUSUAL EVENTS (p. 90-91). Bastion Books. Kindle Edition.

passage most often used to show that faith is necessary proves just the opposite. Matthew 13:58 tells us that “he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.” However, in spite of their unbelief in Him, Jesus did “lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them” (Mark 6:5). But if Jesus healed some, even though there was no faith there, then belief is certainly not a condition of the miracle being performed. Even for what Jesus called “a wicked and adulterous generation” He offered the miracle of the Resurrection (Matthew 12:39–40). Indeed, Jesus appeared to His unbelieving brothers, James and Jude (1 Corinthians 15:6–7; see James 1:1; Jude 1). Likewise, Christ appeared to His unbelieving disciple, Thomas, saying, “Stop doubting and believe” (John 20:27).”⁷⁴

Thomas Edgar summarises the cessationist response well when he writes:

“In this system advocated by Deer, believers do not really have a gift of healing or performing miracles. They merely receive occasional power, apart from their own will, and are able to perform only at the time that power is given. This conveniently places the responsibility for failures on God. However, Deere and other charismatics maintain that failure is due to a lack of faith by the healer or a lack of faith by the person who needs healing. But which is it? Does a healing only work when God dispenses the power to heal, provided the healer exercises the proper amount of faith and the afflicted person has faith to be healed? Does the healing fail if any of these is missing? Is it God’s sovereign will to heal and dispense power, only to be thwarted by the healer or the sick person? If God can sovereignly dispense temporary power to accomplish healing, can’t he also give power that will last for an extended period of time? Are the gifts of teaching or ruling only temporary?...These and other questions need serious answers.”⁷⁵

VI. Conclusion - Let’s Get Real

“All of that to say, if continuationists are correct that signs and wonders are a part of the normal Christian experience and they are happening with regularity among God’s people, then there should be gifted individuals who should do extraordinary signs and wonders with their laying on of hands. Their ministry should be public — I would suggest a children’s cancer hospital or special ministries department at a local church. And their ministry should be witnessed by believers and unbelievers alike and those signs and wonders should be both undeniable and verifiable.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 92-93

⁷⁵ Thomas Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit*, p.97

⁷⁶ <https://hipandthigh.wordpress.com/2013/07/08/the-continuationists-signs-and-wonders-problem/>

Chapter 5: The Spiritual Gift of Prophecy

I. The Nature of the Spiritual Gift of Prophecy

II. The Definition of the Gift of Prophecy

III. The Purpose of the Gift of Prophecy

- 1. To communicate God's will to his people**
- 2. To lay the foundation of the Church**
- 3. To build up the Church**

IV. Why Many Believe the Gift of Prophecy Has Ceased

- 1. The foundation of the Church has been laid**
- 2. The Scriptures are complete and sufficient**
- 3. 'Prophecy' today does not match biblical prophecy**

V. N.T. Prophets Prophesied Without Error

VI. Dangers of Fallible Prophecy

VII. Answering Objections, New Testament Prophecy:

- 1. will not necessarily continue in this age (1 Cor 13)**
- 2. will not characterise this age (Acts 2)**
- 3. is not to be sought by believers (1 Cor 12-14)**
- 4. is not needed to build up the church today (1 Cor 14)**
- 5. was not practised by figures from church history**

VIII. A Word About Impressions

Conclusion

I. The Nature of the Spiritual Gift of Prophecy

1. The example of Moses and Aaron (Ex 7:1-2) reveals that "the prophet is essentially a person who speaks on behalf of another."⁷⁷ Based on this example, these authors go on to say:

- "The person who prophesies is not the inventor of the words to be spoken. That person is merely the conveyor of the message."
- "There is no confusion between the person who speaks the message and the person whose message is spoken...God gives the word. The prophet speaks."
- "...the person who acts as the 'prophet' does so only when conveying the message that has been given..."

2. Prophetic words were tested for orthodox content (Deut. 13:1-5) and predictive success (Deut. 18:15-22) to validate the prophet or expose them as a false prophet. If any prophet

⁷⁷ Burgess, Stanley M. and Gary B. Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, p.730

taught or predicted error, they were declared a false prophet and dealt with severely. The success rate had to be 100%, with no exceptions⁷⁸.

3. In the OT, there were schools or companies of prophets (1 Sam 19:18-24; 2 Kings 2; 2 Kings 4:38-44; Amos 7:14). This means there were often a significant number of prophets in Israel at any one time, all subject to the prophetic tests of Deuteronomy 13 and 18. Simply because many prophets existed at any time did not demean or lessen the high standard they were held to (e.g. Hananiah in Jeremiah 28).

4. Prophecy could contain elements of both foretelling (predicting future events) and forth telling (exposing sin, preaching repentance and alike).

5. Visual demonstrations sometimes accompanied prophecy (e.g., Jer 19, 27; Ezk 4; Acts 21:10-11)

6. Prophets often introduced their message with a categorical statement like “The Lord said to me,” underscoring the impeccability of the message (Isa 8:1, Jer 7:1, Ez 38:1, Hos 4:1, Joel 2:12, Acts 21:10-11).

7. The gift of prophecy in the NT was not given to all and so not available to all (1 Cor 12).

8. There is no biblical indication that the gift of prophecy in the NT differed from that in the OT. Indeed, the OT prophets are mentioned alongside NT prophets throughout the book of Acts without Luke making any distinction between them⁷⁹.

II. The Definition of the Gift of Prophecy

The biblical gift of prophecy may be defined as the ability to receive and communicate direct revelation from God that contains both foretelling and forth-telling⁸⁰.

III. The Purpose of the Gift of Prophecy

1. In the OT, the prophet was God’s (direct) voice to his people. Through prophets, God communicated his will for his people and reminded them of the obligations and potential blessings of the Mosaic Covenant⁸¹.

2. In the NT, prophets and their prophecy served to help lay the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20, 3:5, 4:11). The prophets provided short-term authoritative instruction and guidance for the church in the absence of NT Scripture. They helped to see the church expand throughout the Roman world as a new Jewish-Gentile entity (Eph 3:5). Paul, as an Apostle and Prophet, was also used to write Scripture (cf. Acts 13:1-2).

⁷⁸ Contrary to Jack Deere, “Some people think one missed or failed prediction makes a person a false prophet. The Bible, though, doesn’t call someone a false prophet for simply missing a prediction.” Deere, Jack S.. Surprised by the Voice of God, p. 68. Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

⁷⁹ Under point V there is a table showing that Luke mentions OT and NT prophets throughout Acts without making any distinctions between them.

⁸⁰ BDAG (p.723) gives three ways the word ‘prophecy’ (προφητεῖω) is used in the NT: (1) “proclaim a divine revelation”; (2) “prophetically reveal what is hidden”; (3) “foretell the future”.

⁸¹ When Israel moved from a theocracy to a monarchy, prophetic activity seemed to increase dramatically. Under the monarchy it could not be guaranteed that any king would represent God well to the people, thus the prophets were God’s way of having a guaranteed, continuous, authoritative voice among his people.

3. Prophecy, like all spiritual gifts, was given for the common good of the church (1 Cor 12:7). It served to encourage, build-up, comfort, strengthen and exhort believers (1 Cor 14:3, 5, 22; Acts 15:32).

IV. Why Many Believe the Gift of Prophecy Has Ceased

1. The church's foundation was laid, and the ministry of prophets was no longer needed.

According to Ephesians 2:20⁸², the prophets, along with the Apostles, were the foundation of the church, in the same way that Christ was the chief cornerstone. The NT prophets and the Apostles communicated God's truth to the early church, providing leadership and guidance in the absence of completed Scripture. With the task of building the foundation complete and the NT prophets off the scene, the spiritual gift of prophecy likely passed away too.

Some want to argue that Ephesians 2:20 refers to OT prophets, not NT prophets, or that the verse should be translated, "Apostles who were prophets⁸³." Why would anyone want to argue this? So that this verse can be removed from the cessationist arsenal! Ephesians 2:20 puts prophets on the same level as Apostles with respect to authority and influence. When establishing the foundation of the church, both Apostles and prophets acted infallibly with regard to giving divine guidance. Yet continuationists want to argue for fallible NT prophets (see point V) to give their modern expression of 'prophecy' some biblical credibility. Ephesians 2:20 (and Ephesians 3:5), however, stand in their way, at least to some degree.

In response, the following evidence shows that Ephesians 2:20 refers to NT prophets who were a distinct entity to the Apostles:

1. Apostles and prophets are mentioned together in Ephesians 4:11; they are referred to as spiritually gifted people given by Christ to the church to help bring the church to maturity (4:16). It is obvious two distinct NT groups are in view;
2. Ephesians 3:5⁸⁴ also mentions Apostles and prophets together, this time in the same kind of grammatical construction that we see in 2:20. It is evident that 3:5 is referring to NT prophets because they are contrasted with those from 'other generations' before Christ.
3. The Greek construction "...the Apostles and Prophets..." in Ephesians 2:20 strongly argues for the groups being separate entities. "...the syntactical evidence is very much against the 'identical' view...there are no clear examples of plural nouns in TSKS fitting the 'identical' group in the NT, rendering such a possibility here [Eph 2:20] less likely on grammatical grounds"⁸⁵.

⁸² "19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*" (Ephesians 2:19-20, NASB)

⁸³ See Grudem, Systematic Theology, p. 1051. In footnote 4 he references his book "The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today" where he argues his case more thoroughly.

⁸⁴ "4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;" (Ephesians 3:4-5 NASB)

⁸⁵ Dan Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, pp.284-285. In the NT there is a special construction referred to as the Granville Sharp Rule or simply 'TSKS'. It consists of 2 nouns (the 'S') connected by 'and' (the 'K') and introduced by 'the' (the 'T'). "The Apostles and Prophets" in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 fit this construction. The Granville Sharp Rule says that when both nouns are singular, personal and not proper, then they refer to the same entity. However 'Apostles and Prophets' are plural nouns, not singular, so the rule does not apply and a lot of work needs to be done to prove the two groups are identical. In fact, Wallace's point is that there are no such examples of plural nouns in this construction being identical.

4. In both 2:20 and 3:5, Apostles are mentioned first. If OT prophets were in view, you'd expect them to be mentioned first.

2. The Scriptures being complete (AD 95?), the ministry of prophets was no longer needed.

The sufficiency of Scripture is compromised if direct revelation from God has continued after the closing of the canon. The Scriptures themselves indicate that they are all the divine revelation the believer (and church) need to live a faithful and fruitful life (2 Tim 3:16-17, 2 Pet 1:3-4; Jude 1:3). The Scriptures are not all we need to live the Christian life, (we also need the church, one another), but they are all the divine revelation we need.⁸⁶

3. The nature of the spiritual gift of prophecy claimed today and throughout church history simply does not match the nature of the NT gift of prophecy.

Prophets in the Bible were infallible; they always spoke truth, or else they were considered false prophets. Today, the only form of 'prophecy' evidenced in charismatic circles is that of fallible 'prophecy.' Prophecy where the so-called prophet may get the prophecy, or parts of it, wrong. According to the Bible, this is the definition of a false prophet, so the appropriate warnings should be heeded (Matthew 7:15-23⁸⁷, 24:24; 1 John 4:1).

V. N.T. Prophets Prophesied Without Error

A Spurious Definition of Prophecy

John Piper came up with this convenient definition of prophecy. "It is a Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained utterance that does not carry intrinsic, divine authority and may be mixed with error."⁸⁸

Without this definition, the credibility of current-day 'prophecy' and 'prophets' in charismatic circles vanishes. Therefore Piper, Grudem, Storms, Brown, Deere and alike argue vigorously for it. Let's examine the issue.

Arguments (and Responses) for Fallible Prophecy

1. A possible meaning for the word 'prophet' in the NT is 'fallible prophet.'⁸⁹

⁸⁶ I go further than most in holding that the sufficiency of Scripture rules out all impressions and subjective forms of divine guidance or encouragement. If God directs, comforts and guides via subjective means that is still divine revelation. God is supposedly telling the believer where to go, or what to buy or who to hire or what a Scripture passage means or whatever, he's just not doing so audibly through a prophet. Here I agree with Grudem who wrote, "But if these [cessationist] writers allow for the present activity of the Holy Spirit enabling Christians to 'understand' or 'recall to mind' or 'apply' or 'grasp' the teachings of Scripture, then there does not seem to be such a great difference in principle between what they are saying and what many in the charismatic movement are doing...what Gaffin and Reymond here call 'illumination,' the New Testament seems to call a 'revelation,'..." (Grudem, Systematic theology, p.1042)

⁸⁷ Notice here the prophets prophesy in Jesus' name yet are false. They are to be judged by their fruit which includes the words they utter in Jesus' name.

⁸⁸ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-authority-and-nature-of-the-gift-of-prophecy> Right off the bat it needs to be stated that this definition is anachronistic. It does not come from Scripture, it is a charismatic reading of their current experience back into Scripture in order to validate their experience.

⁸⁹ Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.1050-1051

Response

- There is minimal and obscure evidence for this definition. John Michael Beasley takes Grudem to task for how he garnered his evidence. Grudem has appeared to ignore how the word ‘prophet’ is used in the OT. Rather he used pagan uses of the term to come up with a broad definition that allows for fallibility. This definition he then imposes on the NT;⁹⁰
- Nowhere in the Bible do you find this type of prophet;
- It is inconceivable that NT authors would invent a new category of prophet that had no continuity with the OT;
- In Acts, OT and NT prophets are listed alongside each other, with Luke making no distinction between them. How is a reader meant to understand that one type of prophet was infallible and the other fallible? The following table shows references to ‘prophets’ in the book of Acts.

OT Prophets/Prophecy in Acts	NT Prophets/Prophecy in Acts
<p>Acts 2:16 (Joel)</p> <p>Acts 2:17-21 (Joel’s prophecy)</p> <p>Acts 3:24 (all the prophets from Samuel on)</p> <p>Acts 7:37 (quote of Deut 18:15)</p> <p>Acts 10:43 (all the prophets – could also be NT prophets)</p> <p>Acts 13:27 (by rejecting Jesus, the people of Jerusalem fulfilled the words of the prophets they read every Sabbath)</p> <p>Acts 13:40; 15:15 (Paul quotes the prophets)</p> <p>Acts 24:14, 26:22 (Paul believes what is written in the prophets)</p> <p>Acts 26:27 (Paul asks Agrippa if he believes the prophets)</p> <p>Acts 28:23 (Paul teaching from the prophets)</p>	<p>Acts 11:27 (some prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem)</p> <p>Acts 11:28 (Agabus predicted a famine ‘through the Spirit’. Luke adds that what Agabus predicted happened.)</p> <p>Acts 13:1 (the prophets and teachers in Antioch are mentioned)</p> <p>Acts 15:32 (Judas and Silas, prophets, encouraged the believers)</p> <p>Acts 21:9 (Philip’s four daughters were prophetesses)</p> <p>Acts 21:10-11 (Agabus predicts Paul will be arrested in Jerusalem, saying ‘the Holy Spirit says...’)</p>

Again, if the NT prophets were ‘less’ than the OT prophets, based on Luke’s narrative, how would any reader know to make the distinction?

2. The NT prophets were not on the same level as OT prophets or Apostles; at least most NT prophets weren’t.

Interestingly Grudem agrees that there were some infallible NT prophets. Commenting on Ephesians 2:20, he writes:

⁹⁰ John Michael Beasley, *The Fallible Prophets of New Calvinism*, pp.41-45

“...these prophets are ones who provided the foundation of the church, and therefore these are prophets who spoke infallible words of God. Where we disagree [with cessationists] is on the question of whether this verse describes the character of all who had the gift of prophecy in the New Testament churches. I see no convincing evidence that it describes all who prophesied in the early church.”⁹¹

Response

- There is no evidence (let alone convincing evidence) of a ‘class 2, fallible prophet’;
- NT prophets are listed alongside Apostles in Eph 2:20, 3:5 and 4:11. This clearly shows their significance and importance;
- NT prophets are listed as 2nd behind Apostles in 1 Cor 12:28, again emphasising their significance;
- OT and NT prophets are mentioned in Acts with no hint of them being different in nature

3. The prophecy of Agabus in Acts 21 concerning Paul’s pending imprisonment contained truth and error.

Agabus is the only NT prophet in Scripture who gives a prophecy. This makes him, and his prophesy a lightning rod in the debate over the nature of NT prophecy. Charismatics want to argue that Agabus was fallible and his prophesy contained truth and error. They do this with gusto to justify/validate the (very) sub-biblical standard of prophecy in their Charismatic world. As one wit has put it, the charismatics are attempting to throw prophecy under the Agabus!⁹²

Here is Agabus’ prophecy:

¹⁰ As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And he came to us and took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and hand him over to the Gentiles.’” ¹² When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents *began* begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul replied, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” ¹⁴ And since he would not be persuaded, we became quiet, remarking, “The will of the Lord be done!” (NASB)

While Grudem and co are happy to say that Agabus got the big picture right, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and ended up in Roman custody; they accuse him of getting the details wrong. In particular:

- (1) the Jews didn’t bind Paul. The Romans did and
- (2) the Jews didn’t hand him over; the Romans took him by force from them.

Thus, the charismatics say, Agabus’ prophesy, uttered in the name of the Holy Spirit, contained truth and error.

⁹¹ Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.1051 fn 4

⁹² Nate Busenitz at <https://thecripplegate.com/series-guide/>

Response

a) Agabus was a credible prophet. He had already correctly predicted a famine (Acts 11:28;

b) Agabus uttered the prophecy in Acts 21 with the introduction, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says'. Grudem wants to redefine this formula to mean "this is generally what the Spirit says," so Agabus can be reshaped into the image of a modern charismatic. However, comparing this introduction with others in the NT shows that the Spirit was speaking through him as far as Agabus was concerned.

Grudem argues:

"Now it is true that Agabus uses a similar phrase ("Thus says the Holy Spirit") in Acts 21:11, but the same words (Gk. Tade legei) are used by Christian writers just after the time of the New Testament to introduce very general paraphrases or greatly expanded interpretations of what is being reported (so Ignatius, Epistle to the Philadelphians 7:1-2 [about A.D. 108] and Epistle of Barnabas 6:8, 9:2, 5 [A.D. 70-100]). The phrase can apparently mean, 'This is generally (or approximately) what the Holy Spirit is saying to us.'" (Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.1056)

Beasley, however, points out:

- Grudem doesn't tackle the whole phrase "Thus says the Holy Spirit", but only "Thus says";

- Grudem then goes to post-biblical sources (Ignatius and Barnabas) to define 'thus says' as formulae introducing a general statement;

- A thorough exegete should look at similar phrases elsewhere in the Bible to help discern the meaning in the text being examined. Grudem has taken a part of the phrase and gone to extra-biblical sources!

- The biblical parallels to what Agabus said (Acts 21:11), that Grudem should have consulted and used to determine what Agabus meant are: Acts 8:29; 13:2; Heb 3:7; Rev 2:7, 14:13; Rev 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22;

- "The question of indicative attribution in all of these examples is quite plain and clear: in each case, it is the Lord God who speaks to His people, supplying divine and infallible revelation, not the words of men. (p.54)

c) While there's no mention in the narrative that the Jews bound Paul, that doesn't mean they didn't. In fact, the narrative implies they bound him⁹³.

d) The narrative also implies that the Jews were eventually willing to hand him over to the Romans. As with Jesus, the Jews knew they couldn't kill Paul; they needed the Romans to do it for them⁹⁴.

e) Paul's testimony of what happened to him confirmed the details of Agabus's prophecy. Paul stated in Acts 28:17,

¹⁷ After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he *began* saying to them, "Brethren,

⁹³ See point 2 in this article <https://thecripplegate.com/throwing-prophecy-undfer-the-agabus/> accessed 20/1/22

⁹⁴ Ibid.

though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. (NASB)

Grudem and others try to argue that this refers to Paul being transferred from Jewish to Roman custody. However, Paul was a Roman prisoner from the moment the Romans seized him in Acts 21:33. While still in Jerusalem, before going to Caesarea, Paul was called a 'prisoner' of Rome (Acts 23:18).

f) "No one in church history accused Agabus of errant prophecy until modern times."⁹⁵

4. The nature of receiving and reporting prophecy permits error.

Piper believes there are four stages to prophecy: (1) the true revelation comes, but then the prophet has (2) a perception of the revelation, (3) thinks about the revelation, and then (4) reports the revelation. While (1) is infallible, steps (2) through (4) are all fallible; the prophet can introduce error in each or any of those steps. (John Piper <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-new-testament-gift-of-prophecy>)

Response

- a) Where does Piper get this process from? Certainly not Scripture!
- b) If the OT prophets could receive and relate prophecy without error, why not NT prophets? Moreover, how could prophets living under the new covenant's blessings have an inferior prophecy gift to those who lived under the Old covenant?
- c) What was God's purpose in allowing such a change, especially given prophets were to build up the church?
- d) Is Piper suggesting that the revelation is not word-based and requires interpretation and thought? If so, it is not biblical prophecy as defined above. If the revelation is word-based, the prophet simply has to report the words given, which you would imagine would be an ability that came with the gift (like in the OT).

5. People and other prophets were called to 'sift' prophesies to take the good and reject the wrong parts of the prophecy (1 Cor 14:29, 1 Thes 5:19-21)

Response

- People were to sift the prophesies to see if the prophet was true or false, as has always been the case (cf. Deut 13 & 18);
- 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 has more in common with 1 John 4:1 than 1 Corinthians 14:29. Beasley writes:

"Compton has well refuted Grudem's assumptions about this passage: "...Grudem points to 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21, 'Do not despise prophetic utterances, but examine everything carefully,' as the key parallel in support of his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:29. Yet the verb used in 1 Thessalonians

⁹⁵ <https://thecripplegate.com/throwing-prophecy-under-the-agabus/> accessed 20/1/22

5:21 is the same verb used in 1 John 4:1 where John says, 'Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.' Clearly in 1 John 4:1 the verb has the idea of testing the prophets to judge the true from the false, as even Grudem acknowledges." [Compton, *The Continuation of New Testament Prophecy*, p.8]⁹⁶

6. The analogy with the gift of teaching. Just as teachers speak the truth with error (and at different levels of competency), so do those with the gift of prophecy.

Response

- The analogy breaks down because the gifts are different. The prophet receives and communicates direct revelation from God; it is either true or false. However, a teacher works to understand and communicate Scripture, a revelation that all have access to. Error is anathema to one, an occupational hazard for the other.⁹⁷
- Charismatics uses a particular understanding of Romans 12:6 to teach that people minister their gifts at different competency levels. When applied to prophecy (or miracles or tongues), this allows for fallibility and error. The New Century Version (NCV) translates Romans 12:6 well,

⁶ We all have different gifts, each of which came because of the grace God gave us. The person who has the gift of prophecy should use that gift in agreement with the faith..."

The word 'faith' has a definite article ('the') before it. While sometimes 'the' can be translated as a pronoun, often when it precedes the word 'faith', it refers to the body of truth that defines the Christian faith. This translation makes good sense in Romans 12:6. Paul called on prophets to prophesy in accordance with the Christian faith, not to prophesy falsely.⁹⁸

VI. Dangers of Allowing for Fallible Prophecy Today (mostly cf. Beasley⁹⁹)

1. It leads to confusion and error in the church. Rather than simply accepting or rejecting the prophecy (as per normal biblical practice), listeners must somehow discern what to keep and what to reject. The potential for error and confusion entering the church under such an arrangement is significant.

2. Such a definition relabels what Scripture defines as a false prophet and undermines the only definitive test for a prophet in Scripture.

⁹⁶ John Michael Beasley, *The Fallible Prophets of New Calvinism*, pp.115-116

⁹⁷ Having said this, if teaching was the supernatural ability to teach God's truth then the charismatics' point stands, another reason to suggest all the gifts have ceased.

⁹⁸ Paul recognized the latent danger in allowing prophecy to take place in the churches if it was untested against the established truths of the faith. At Corinth (1 Cor 14:29) he commanded, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge" (diakrinetōsan: pass judgment on). The possibility was all too real that individuals claiming prophetic inspiration might express ideas that ran counter to true Christian doctrine. The true prophet does what Paul enjoins here: he prophesies in agreement with the faith." Hodges, Zane. *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath* (Kindle Locations 8380-8409)

⁹⁹ John Michael Beasley, pp.11-13, 122-137

3. This kind of 'prophecy' promotes an unhealthy level of subjectivism among God's people and gives protection to false prophets and frauds.
4. How can prophecies that don't contradict Scripture be tested, such as those that sound more like a horoscope?
5. "...there is great potential for doubt and uncertainty among those who desire to obey God under the guidance of fallible prophecy." (John Michael Beasley, p.12)
6. Under fallible prophecy, everyone can have a go regardless of maturity or holiness. This is incredibly dangerous for a church called to holiness, called to love the truth (1 Cor 13:6)
7. "...what can be said about a deity that tries, ineffectually, to communicate through prophetic intermediaries?" (John Michael Beasley, p.122)
8. This view of prophecy encourages believers to look for messages from God outside the Bible.
9. If the advocates of fallible prophets applied the same criteria to Jesus as they do to Agabus, then Jesus prophesied error. Jesus predicted that not one stone of the Jerusalem temple would be left upon another (Matt 24:2). Yet the wailing wall in the city today testifies that some stones were left upon each other!

VII. Answering Objections

Objection 1: Prophecy will continue until the 'perfect' comes. If the 'perfect' refers to the eternal state, which most commentators believe, then prophecy will continue till the Lord returns.

Response

Passages like Joel 2 and Revelation 11 reveal that prophecy will resume after the church age. It will then subsequently cease with the arrival of the eternal state. This, however, does not mean that the spiritual gift of prophecy could not or did not cease during the church age for various reasons.

Objection 2: Peter claimed in Acts 2 that Joel's prophecy was being fulfilled at Pentecost. According to Joel, the gift of prophecy will be widespread throughout this age.

Response

Joel's prophecy, though referred to, was not fulfilled in Acts 2. The prophecy distinctly says that the Spirit will be poured out on all people (Acts 2:17), that there will be signs in the heavens (Acts 2:19-20) and makes no mention of tongues. Keller quotes Dr Arnold Fruchtenbaum on this point:

"Virtually nothing that happened in Acts 2 is predicted in Joel 2. What actually did happen in Acts two (the speaking in tongues) was not mentioned by Joel. What Joel did mention (dreams, visions, the sun darkened, the moon turned into blood) did not happen in Acts two. Joel was speaking of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole of the nation of Israel in the last days, while Acts two speaks of the outpouring

of the Holy Spirit on the Twelve Apostles or, at most, on the 120 in the Upper Room. This is a far cry from Joel's all flesh. However, there was one point of similarity, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulting in unusual manifestations. Acts two does not change or reinterpret Joel two, nor does it deny that Joel two will have a literal fulfillment when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the whole nation of Israel. It is simply applying it to a New Testament event because of one point of similarity."¹⁰⁰

Peter quoted Joel 2 to help those gathered see the Holy Spirit had been poured out and that now, as Joel predicted, anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (see Joel 2:32 and Acts 2:21). The fulfillment, with the associated mass prophesying, awaits the end of this age.

Objection 3: The NT nowhere says that prophecy has ceased.

Response

No direct statement of cessation is needed. The question is, 'Does the Bible teach cessationism?' This constant cry from charismatics for an explicit statement from Scripture is tiresome. They do not have direct statements for their core beliefs (tongues not being human languages, fallible prophets in the NT, a gift of miracles and healings that often doesn't work etc.). Both sides in this debate need deduction to prove their case - admit it and move on!

Objection 4: The only explicit purpose for prophecy in the NT is to build up, strengthen and comfort the church (1 Cor 14:3). This need has never disappeared, so why would a gift designed to meet that need disappear?

Response

All the gifts were given to build up the body. This purpose or function did not make prophecy unique. People could be comforted, encouraged and built up via other gifts and other people (with or without gifts). The body analogy in 1 Corinthians 12 reveals that each gifted believer had a unique function to help the church thrive. What made prophecy unique was the communication of divine revelation. When that was no longer needed, nor was the gift.

Objection 5: Figures from church history, notably some Scottish Reformers (like John Knox and George Wishart), together with Charles Spurgeon, had (authenticated) prophetic experiences.

Response

Spurgeon viewed his experiences as unsought, fallible, non-authoritative works of God's providence. [Nathan Busenitz](#) has researched and written on Spurgeon's experiences. I recommend reading his entire article. He concluded:

"Spurgeon classed *subjective impressions* as one of the many ways in which God providentially leads and guides His people. Spurgeon did not equate them with any miraculous or revelatory gift from New Testament times. He did not seek subjective impressions (as many continuationists seek "prophecy"); he did not regard them as a normal part of his Christian experience, nor did he consider them to be either authoritative or infallible...All of that to say: Spurgeon considered the subjective impressions he experienced to be *categorically different* than the New Testament gift

¹⁰⁰ 49 Rich Keller, [A Review of Surprised By Voice of God](#), 2020

of prophecy. That is why he was a cessationist. And modern cessationists would wholeheartedly agree with his assessment.”¹⁰¹

I have not been able to delve into the evidence surrounding the claims made for the prophetic ministries of the Scottish Covenanters. As Deere recounts, a later historian posited perhaps these men had “sagacious insight”¹⁰², and perhaps some events didn’t quite happen as recorded (we know the tendency of biographers and even auto biographers to exaggerate). Regardless, what is clear, even from Deere’s overly enthusiastic recounting, is that their ‘gifting’ did not match the character and nature of the gift of prophecy in the Bible.

VIII. A Word About Impressions

Thomas Schreiner believes that what Charismatics call prophecy should better be labelled ‘impressions.’ With an impression, apparently, you have an idea (which could be anything from vague to clear) sourced from God (possibly) that finds its way into your head or heart. These ‘impressions’ could be answers to prayer for guidance or wisdom, about the well-being of others in the church, or an interpretation of Scripture (the doctrine of illumination). Schreiner, along with most cessationists, believes that God gives such impressions.

The difference between cessationists and continuationists is in some ways insignificant at the practical level when it comes to prophecy, for what continuationists call prophecy, cessationists call impressions. As a cessationist, I affirm that God may speak to his people through impressions. And there are occasions where impressions are startlingly accurate.¹⁰³

Grudem, a Charismatic, has a very similar view and thinks the issue could be one of semantics. The difference is that Grudem realises that these ‘impressions’ should still be called revelations since they are communications from God to humans:

“The larger point is that what Gaffin and Reymond here call ‘illumination,’ the New Testament seems to call a ‘revelation,’ and what they would call a spoken report of such illumination, the New Testament calls a ‘prophecy.’¹⁰⁴

I agree with Grudem on this point and think cessationists are inconsistent here. Some concerns with thinking impressions come from God are as follows:

1. As revelations from God, impressions undermine the finality and sufficiency of Scripture in the same way that prophecy would if it was still around. If the Scriptures are all the believer needs to live a full, faithful and fruitful life, then impressions and prophecies are unnecessary.

¹⁰¹ Nathan Busentiz, <https://thecripplegate.com/spurgeon-impressions-and-prophecy>, Accessed 18/1/22 . I would perhaps posit a paranormal rather than supernatural explanation for these events.

¹⁰² Deere, Jack S.. Surprised by the Voice of God (p. 79). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰³ Thomas Schreiner, The Spiritual Gifts, p. 89. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰⁴ Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.1042

2. Non-Christians have impressions¹⁰⁵ and premonitions¹⁰⁶. To have an impression, a sense about something, or even a premonition is not distinctly Christian. Many Christians seem to commit the 'God of the gaps' fallacy regarding impressions. 'If I can't explain a voice I hear, a feeling I have, or an insight that pops into my head, then it must be from God.' However, if non-Christians have the same experiences, then that conclusion is simply not justified. It seems to me that the human mind is way more powerful than we might think. It also seems apparent that some people are simply more intuitive than others and are more likely to sense impressions than others.

3. The same is true of dreams. Dreams are a natural and normal part of the human experience. It should be no surprise that religious people have religious dreams since much of their life is consumed with religious thinking. Having a spiritual dream does not mean the dream comes from God.¹⁰⁷

4. Impressions are incredibly subjective. Sometimes, they might be clear and prove accurate, but other times, they are vague and wrong. Impressions are random (not under the control of the person), fallible (sometimes wrong or at least contain error) and unverifiable (concerning the source). Do we genuinely believe that God communicates in such a way today? In Scripture, and indeed with Scripture, God communicated very clearly.

Conclusion

The spiritual gift of prophecy in the NT was the ability to accurately relay divine revelation from God, whether foretelling or forth-telling. Just as in the OT, prophets were judged as either true or false. There was no middle ground, no room for error. NT prophets and the Apostles laid the church's foundation and were used to guide the early church before the completion of Scripture. When Scripture was completed, no more divine revelation was needed or given, so the gift faded out. Claims of prophecy today by charismatics simply do not match the nature of the gift revealed in the Bible.

¹⁰⁵ "Impressions of the Spirit can come in response to urgent prayer or unsolicited when needed. Sometimes the Lord reveals truth to you when you are not actively seeking it, such as when you are in danger and do not know it. However, the Lord will not force you to learn. You must exercise your agency to authorize the Spirit to teach you. As you make this a practice in your life, you will be more perceptive to the feelings that come with spiritual guidance. Then, when that guidance comes, sometimes when you least expect it, you will recognize it more easily." Sounds very evangelical doesn't it, could be Grudem or Deere, or even Schreiner. It was in fact Richard G. Scott, one the 12 Apostles of the Mormon Church (died 2015) read his entire article <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2009/10/to-acquire-spiritual-guidance?lang=eng>. New Age examples are also abundant, but impressions are not limited to the religious either. Now I do understand that just because false teachers have spiritual impressions doesn't mean all impressions are not from God. I recognise that Satan is a master counterfeiter. However, knowing that impressions are not a uniquely Christian phenomenon should cause us to approach them, especially their source, with caution.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.bustle.com/p/11-creepy-premonitions-that-actually-came-true-6029854>

¹⁰⁷ For an excellent paper on 'Christian' dreams that Muslims have see, "An Evaluation of Muslim Dreams & Visions of Isa (Jesus)" by Dennis McBride, July, 2010 available online.

Chapter 6: The Spiritual Gift of Tongues

I. The Nature and Definition of the Gift of Tongues

1. The word 'tongues' means human languages
2. Tongues in the book of Acts are clearly human languages
3. Tongues as human languages best fits 1 Corinthians

II. The Purpose of Tongues

1. Evangelism
2. Edification
3. Judgment on Israel, blessing on the Gentiles

III. Why and When Tongues Ceased

IV. Tongues were not:

1. Angelic Languages
2. Ecstatic Speech
3. Private Prayer Languages
4. Evidence of the Holy Spirit
5. Human languages in Acts but not in Corinthians

Conclusion

I. The Nature and Definition of the Gift of Tongues

Tongues referred to the ability to speak in a human language not previously learnt. Three lines of evidence argue that this definition is the only one biblically viable:

1. The word translated 'tongues' means 'human languages' (γλῶσσα = glossa)
2. Tongues were human languages in Acts 2, 10, 19
3. Tongues as human languages make the best sense in 1 Corinthians 12-14

1. The meaning of the word 'tongue' (glossa)

Thomas Edgar did an extensive word study on glossa¹⁰⁸. This table summarises his findings:

The Meaning of the word 'tongues' (γλῶσσα = glossa)			
Classical Greek	Judaism B.C.	Secular writing	LXX (occurs 155 times)
1. Physical tongue	1. Physical tongue	1. Physical tongue	1. Physical tongue
2. Human language	2. Human language	2. Human language	2. Human language
Never ecstatic unintelligible speech			Never ecstatic unintelligible speech
<u>Glossa in the NT</u> (occurs 50 times)			
1. Physical tongue (e.g., Luke 16:24) 2. Human language (e.g., Philippians 2:11)			
Those who say glossa is ecstatic speech are proposing an entirely new meaning for the word, which it never had before the first century AD.			

Some try to say that ecstatic speech occurs in the O.T. as follows:

- "ecstatic fervor", 1 Samuel 10:5f, 19:20f and 1 Kings 18:29f

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Edgar, Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit, pp.110-137

- “broken cries and unintelligible speech, 2 Kings 9:11
 - “ecstatic babbling of obscure words”, Isa 28:10f
 - “ecstatic frenzy; that is raving gestures and outcries”, Numbers 11:25ff.
- (all quoted from Edgar, who is quoting Behm, p. 115-116)

Edgar shows that none of the examples holds up under scrutiny. They refer either to prophesy, known languages or pagan ritual gibberish (the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18!)

In the N.T., the word occurs 50 times and is used in the usual sense of the physical tongue or human language (p.116). The only disputed uses are disputed by charismatics when the word is describing the gift of tongues. This means charismatics are positing a new meaning for the word ‘glossa’ in the N.T., alongside its typical uses. Yet since the ordinary meaning of glossa as human language does fit the context of the ‘tongues’ passages, those advocating for a novel meaning are out of line. The disputed passages are Mark 16:17, Acts 2:4ff, 10:46, 19:6 and 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Glossa in BDAG

The most popular Greek lexicon says ‘glossa’ in 1 Corinthians 12-14 refers to “...the broken speech of persons in religious ecstasy”¹⁰⁹. However, (1) they list the normal usage outside any passage connected to the gift as ‘language’ or the physical ‘tongue’; (2) “Arndt and Gingrich admit that they have no evidence for regarding glossa as a reference to ecstatic speech by describing its use in the disputed passages as a ‘special problem’ and as a ‘technical term.’; (3) they omit Acts 2:4-11 under this definition; (4) they reference this “phenomenon, as found in Hellenistic religion”, that is, they admit it has pagan roots. BDAG has made an unfortunate error by allowing such a meaning in 1 Corinthians 12-14.¹¹⁰

2. Tongues in the Book of Acts always refer to human languages

a) Acts 2:6, 8-11 very clearly refers to known human languages. The miracle here was not in the hearing, as 2:4 explicitly states they spoke in other tongues. Since this passage is the only one in the Bible that describes the nature of the tongues, it should be determinative for further references.

b) In Acts 10:46, the tongues are not described, so Luke assumes the reader will know what the word means from Acts 2. This is especially so since Peter refers to the event as the same thing that happened to them at the beginning (11:15-17), meaning it was the same manifestation they experienced at Pentecost in Acts 2.

c) In Acts 19:6, no description of tongues is given. Luke assumes the reader will import the previous meaning.

3. Tongues as human languages make the best sense in 1 Corinthians 12-14

In 1 Corinthians 12-14, the nature of tongues is not defined. Most exegetes should be content to translate the unknown by the known and so import the known meaning of tongues (Acts 2) into 1 Corinthians. This is especially so given the word ‘tongue’ itself has a very well-attested meaning of ‘human language’. But with the rise of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement in the 20th century, pressure has come to change the definition of ‘tongues’, at

¹⁰⁹ BDAG, 2nd ed, p.162

¹¹⁰ Edgar, p.142

least in 1 Corinthians, to an angelic tongue or an ecstatic utterance (unintelligible mystery language). However, tongues as human languages make the best sense in 1 Corinthians 14.

a) The context of 1 Corinthians 12-14

In these chapters, Paul is rebuking and correcting the Corinthians for using tongues in the church in an unhelpful and disorderly way. These chapters are not a manual on the nature and use of tongues outside the church service. Instead, they simply prohibit the use of uninterpreted tongues in the church.¹¹¹

Here is a structural overview of 1 Corinthians 14:

1 Corinthians 14 – Regarding Prophecy and Tongues¹¹²		
<p><u>The Principle (1-19)</u></p> <p>Prophecy is much better in church than uninterpreted tongues.</p> <p>Reason? One is understandable and so edifies; the other is not and so does not.</p>	<p><u>The Purpose (20-25)</u></p> <p>Tongues are a sign for unbelievers; prophecy is for believers.</p>	<p><u>The Practice (26-38)</u></p> <p>In church allow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 or 3 interpreted tongues - 2 or 3 prophets <p>But know who needs to be “silent” when (regards tongues, prophecy and women)</p>
<p>Conclusion (39-40) – be zealous for prophecy, allow interpreted tongues, but do everything in a fitting and orderly way.</p>		

b) Human languages v ecstatic/angel language in key texts

In 1 Corinthians 14, the translation of human languages for tongues works just as well, if not better, than ‘ecstatic utterance’.

14:2, “For anyone speaking in an *uninterpreted language* does not speak to men but to God. Indeed no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.” [italics are my interpretation for tongues given the context]

- 1) The tongues speaker doesn’t speak to men because they don’t understand the language; only God does.
- 2) Mysteries in the Bible do not refer to mystical gibberish but to truths once hidden but now revealed (cf. Ephesians 3:4)¹¹³.
- 3) To speak with ‘his spirit’ simply means the speaker’s mind was not engaged (cf. 14:14-15)

¹¹¹ This needs to be stressed because Charismatics view 1 Cor 14 in a positive light as manual for the use of tongues. Since they are wrong on the big picture, they are more likely to be wrong on the details. “As readers, our interpretation of the details in a passage will always be influenced by our conception of the overall purpose- or big idea-of a passage. Unless our understanding of the big idea is properly formed, our interpretation of the details will necessarily be skewed.” (Berding, *What Are Spiritual Gifts*, pp.52-52)

¹¹² A more detailed summary table of 1 Corinthians 14 is at the end of these notes

¹¹³ The NCV translates mysteries as ‘secret things’

14:4, “He who speaks in an uninterpreted language edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church”

- 1) This could well be sarcasm as the whole point of gifts was to edify others (12:7, 14:12). Paul is therefore giving another reason not to speak in uninterpreted tongues in church, the only one who could possibly benefit (be built up) is the tongues speaker, but even he can't be built up because his mind is unfruitful (14:14)!
- 2) See 1 Cor 8:10, where 'to edify' or 'build up' is used negatively.
- 3) How is one edified if they don't understand anything? The answer is they are not. This is almost Paul's entire argument in chapter 14!
- 4) Even if 'build up' in this verse is taken positively, an unknown human language works just as well as ecstatic speech since the speaker understands neither.

14:6-19, Paul explains, at length, the principle that prophecy in church is far superior to uninterpreted tongues. There is no reference to 'tongues' in these verses where 'ecstatic speech' makes more or better sense than 'unknown language'. Some suggest that verses 10-11 indicate tongues as something other than a human language because “Something is not usually identical to that which it is said to be analogous to (cf. the other analogies used in vv.7-9)¹¹⁴. However, the analogies here do not speak to the nature of tongues. Rather they all illustrate the meaninglessness of uninterpreted tongues. Verses 10-11 draw an image from everyday life in a cosmopolitan city like Corinth, where many languages are spoken, but if not by you, there is a communication barrier. So too, if tongues, as known languages, are not interpreted in church, people who don't speak that language may as well be in a foreign land¹¹⁵.

14:20-22, Paul gives the purpose for tongues; they are for unbelievers, not believers. This text will be examined in more detail shortly. For now, note that Paul refers to Isaiah 28:11-12, a text that talks about unknown human languages, to help explain the purpose of tongues. As the NIV Study Bible writes:

“The passage from Isa. 28 indicates that the foreign language of the Assyrians was a sign to unbelieving Israel that judgment was coming on them. Paul deduced from this fact that tongues were intended to be a sign for unbelievers (v.22), as, e.g., in Acts 2:4-12.”¹¹⁶

Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11-12 in 14:21, then begins 14:22 with 'Tongues, then, are a sign...', clearly equating the tongues in Corinth with the foreign language in Isaiah 28. The same is true for the tongues in 14:23, given that verse is introduced with 'therefore', concluding the argument started in v.21.

Even if, in the face of such overwhelming evidence, some were to suggest 14:22 still refers to ecstatic speech, how would they function as a sign to unbelievers? Ecstatic speech has happened in many non-Christian settings. It is not exclusively 'Christian' [I argue it is not Christian at all!]. It is easy to see how the ability to speak in an unlearned foreign language (when interpreted) serves as a sign to unbelievers (cf. Acts 2), but not so ecstatic speech. So

¹¹⁴ See, Robert Saucy, *Four Views*, p.131 fn. 57

¹¹⁵ Saucy and others want to argue that since Corinth was cosmopolitan there would be people in church who could understand tongues if they were known languages and so interpretation would not be needed. This is an argument from silence. However, even if a few people could understand the tongue in church, chances are most wouldn't, thus the need for interpretation. This objection is a smoke screen with no substance.

¹¹⁶ NIV Study Bible, p.1754

here is one definite passage in 1 Corinthians 14 where only tongues as human languages make sense; ecstatic speech simply doesn't work.

14:28, "but if there is no interpreter, he is to keep silent in church; and have him speak to himself and to God."

1) In this verse, speaking to himself parallels 'keep silent in the church'; they mean the same thing.

2) Even if it refers to prayer (which is very unlikely, given 14:15), human language works just as well as ecstatic speech.

This table summarises the discussion. The arguments for tongues as ecstatic or heavenly languages in 1 Corinthians will be assessed later in this paper.

Verse	Unknown Language	Ecstatic Speech
14:2	Speaks to God, not man, as man can't understand	
14:4	Edifies himself – sarcasm	Edifies himself mystically?!
14:6-19	Not understood/helpful unless interpreted.	
14:20-22	Languages (cf. Isa. 28) are a sign for unbelievers	Ecstatic speech in Isa 28?! A sign for unbelievers! – How?
14:28	Speaking to self and God is another way of saying 'be silent' (could be prayer)	Speaking to self & God refers to prayer.
Conclusion – human language works better as a definition for tongues than ecstatic speech in 1 Corinthians 14		

All the above evidence then points to the gift of tongues being the ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages.

II. The Purpose of the Gift of Tongues

Here are the key factors that need to be considered when seeking to discover the purpose of the gift of tongues:

- Paul's explicit purpose statement, "tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers" (1 Cor 14:22, tied in some way to Isaiah 28:11-12). The issues to resolve here are (1) a sign of what? And (2) the significance of the reference to Isaiah.
- The reason given for allowing interpreted tongues in church is "so that the church might be edified" (1 Cor 14:5 cf. 1 Cor 12:7)
- The use of tongues in the book of Acts (Acts 2, 10, 19)
- Tongues as a sign confirming God's word through the disciples as they took the Gospel to all the world (Mark 16:15-20)
- The nature of tongues as a divine revelation on par with prophecy (1 Cor 14:5)
- The fact that tongues needed to be interpreted in church (1 Cor 14:28) but wasn't in Acts (where it was used outside the church service)

The best way to account for all this evidence is to see the primary purpose of tongues as a two-fold sign. On the one hand, it was a sign of blessing towards Gentiles, and on the other, a sign of judgment on unbelieving Israel.

1. A Sign of Blessing on the Gentiles

Tongues as a sign of blessing on the Gentiles are evident from the book of Acts. The book can be divided into three sections, each corresponding to the broad geographical spread of the Gospel commanded in Acts 1:8.

Acts 1-7, the gospel is preached in Jerusalem

Acts 8-12, the gospel is preached in Judea and Samaria

Acts 13-28, the gospel is preached to the uttermost parts

In each region/section of Acts, the gift of tongues appears in Jerusalem (Acts 2), in Caesarea, which was in Samaria (Acts 10), and in Ephesus (Acts 19). As the Gospel spread with it, God gave a supernatural sign that communicated judgment on unbelieving Israel and, at the same time, a blessing on the Gentile nations. The sign of tongues is given in conjunction with the spread of the Gospel to a new geographical location, marking a significant moment and movement in redemptive history. O'Loughlin writes:

“...tongues were a sign of blessing given to all the nations of the world. Through this sign God was indicating that He would no longer speak exclusively a single language (i.e., Hebrew) to a single people (i.e., Israel). Instead, through the gift of tongues, God indicated that He intended to speak in all the languages of the world to all the peoples. Tongues highlighted the universal character of the gospel privilege and availability for all peoples (Acts 2:4-17, 21; 10:44-48; 11:15-18). Tongues were a sign of the extension of the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant (i.e., the reception of the Spirit and justification by God’s grace alone through faith in Christ alone, etc.) to all the nations of the world (Acts 15:7-18; Gal. 3:6-14, 29; Rom. 4:1-25). Hence, tongues marked a point of drastic change in redemptive history. They marked the transition to a truly worldwide gospel outreach, and they also illustrated dramatically the universal character of the body of Christ - the church.”¹¹⁷

And again:

“Acts provides, not a paradigm for individual miraculous Christian experience, but the historical narrative account of the apostolic gospel’s outward movement, geographically, racially or ethnically, and theologically...

...The three other unique receptions of the Spirit accompanied by miraculous tongues-speaking (recorded in Acts 8, 10, and 19) are not repetitions of what took place at Pentecost as parts of a series to continue indefinitely. Rather, they are non-repeatable events in the foundational spread of the gospel through the foundational ministry of the apostles. They are expansions of the Spirit-baptized body formed in Acts 2. Their speaking in tongues was a divine confirmation that these representative groups (i.e., Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and disciples of John) were included into Christ’s church.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ James O'Loughlin, *The Truth About Speaking in Tongues*, location 3277-3278 of 6758

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* locations 2828 and 2861 of 6758

2. A Sign of Judgment on Unbelieving Israel

Yet tongues were also a negative sign of judgment on unbelieving Israel. This is evident from Paul's use of Isaiah 28:11-12. Isaiah said the people of Israel would know God had judged them when they heard foreign languages spoken in their streets. In the same way (not as fulfilment, but as an analogy), the unbelieving Jews in the first century would know they had been judged when they heard foreign languages in their midst, a sign that God was no longer working exclusively with them.

"In summary, tongues served simultaneously as a sign of covenantal curse to unbelieving Israel and conversely as a sign of covenantal blessing extended to all nations. Tongues served as a sign to indicate that God's redemptive program has shifted from an exclusive Jewish centered activity to an inclusive one involving all nations of the world."¹¹⁹

3. Edification

As with all spiritual gifts, tongues had the purpose of building up the church (1 Cor 14:5). It was for the common good (1: Cor 12:7). Interpreted tongues were essentially no different to prophesy in this regard, a helpful revelation from God (1 Cor 14:5). This ties in with tongues being a sign of blessing on the Gentiles. For example, divine revelation recounting 'the wonderful works of God' (Acts 2:11), if interpreted in church, would edify the church in the same way praise edifies the church. It would also edify the church by signalling that God was now working with Jew and Gentile alike in every language of the world.

III. Why and When Tongues Ceased

1. Tongues ceased when their primary purpose as a sign of judgment on Israel's unbelief ceased. National Israel was judged by God when the Romans devastated the land and destroyed Jerusalem AD 66-70.
2. By AD 70, the Gospel had well and truly spread to Rome, so the purpose of tongues as a sign of blessing on the Gentiles was also fulfilled. The Jew-Gentile church was well and truly established.
3. The cessation of tongues is confirmed by modern tongues not matching the biblical description of tongues as unlearned human languages. If tongues are as valid and widespread as many claim, why are the vast majority 'ecstatic utterances'? The evidence today suggests that the ability to speak unlearned foreign languages has ceased.

IV. What Biblical Tongues Were Not

1. Tongues were not angelic languages

a) The reference to the language of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is hyperbole, and it is not certain that Paul believed he could speak it. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 all three verses have the same construction to prove the same point. They all start with an "if", refer to a spiritual gift and then an "extreme or theoretical example of its application. The statement, therefore, points out that not only the normal exercise of the gift apart from love is profitless to the

¹¹⁹ Ibid. location 3326 of 6758

exerciser, but even if it could be used to such an exaggerated or extreme (theoretical) use, it would still be profitless.”¹²⁰

Notice in verse 2 that Paul talks about having prophecy, even such that he understood all mysteries and all knowledge and if he had faith that could move mountains. Well, Paul didn't have that degree of prophecy or that amount of faith. They are extreme/theoretical examples of the gift. Likewise, in verse 3, Paul had not given his body to be burned; it is an extreme (theoretical) example of giving. Looking then at verse 1, you can see the same pattern, if Paul speaks with the tongues of men and (theoretical or extreme example) of angels...

Edgar quotes Hodges, who writes, “While angels no doubt have languages of their own, the apostle no more implies that he expects his readers to use them than he expects them to give their bodies to be burned.”¹²¹ (p.127-128)

b) Even if 1 Corinthians 13:1 is taken to mean humans could speak in angelic languages, they would still be understandable and translatable. In the Bible, angels spoke human languages that people could understand (Gen 19; Luke 1). There is no recorded instance of supernatural beings communicating with human beings in anything other than a human language.

c) How many angelic languages might there be? Nobody knows but given the diversity of languages was given as a curse to judge humanity and separate them from one another, it would seem there should only be a few (if not only one or none¹²²). In this case, people speaking an ‘angelic’ tongue should be speaking the same language or at most the same few languages. Linguistic analysis of glossolalia doesn't bear this out.¹²³

2. Tongues were not ecstatic utterances

a) Ecstatic speech does not work for the meaning of ‘glossa’ in 1 Corinthians 14. It goes against the meaning of the word everywhere else in the Bible and against the definition of tongues in Acts 2. More than this, the meaning of human language works perfectly well for ‘glossa’ in 1 Corinthians 14. To overturn the normal usage of the word, significant and substantial evidence would be needed to show that such a meaning doesn't fit ‘glossa’ in 1 Corinthians 14. Such evidence is not forthcoming.

b) Paul compared tongues to real languages that have meaning (1 Cor 14:10-11, 22 cf. Isa 28:11f). Ecstatic speech is not a real language and has no inherent meaning. That definition simply doesn't work in these passages.

c) Tongues needed to be interpreted. Gibberish cannot be interpreted; if it is, the one interpreting is the one making up meaning. This would render the gift of tongues completely unnecessary.

¹²⁰ Thomas Edgar, “Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit”, pp.125-127

¹²¹ Ibid., pp.127-128

¹²² O’Loughlin, the Truth About Speaking in Tongues, surmises that angels, as spirit beings (not having a body), probably “communicate directly through immaterial thought, not indirectly through material sound symbol sequences, characteristic of human languages.” (location 2438 of 6758)

¹²³ Edgar, p.128-130

d) Ecstatic speech is common in many non-Christian settings. In what way would it be a 'sign to unbelievers' (1 Cor 14:22)? Belief in this kind of 'tongue' does not require the supernatural¹²⁴.

e) Ecstatic speech is not a biblical means of edification. Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 14 is that only that which edifies others should be allowed in church. Uninterpreted tongues don't edify, so they shouldn't be used in church. More than this, the mind of the tongues' speaker is unfruitful (1 Cor 14:14). Nowhere in the Bible are believers told to empty their minds or seek some kind of mystical form of edification, quite the opposite¹²⁵.

3. Tongues were not private prayer languages

a) A private prayer language not understood by the pray-er is unhelpful.

The Bible stresses the need for believers to:

- be transformed via the mind (Rom 12:2)
- love God with all the mind (Matt 22:37-38)
- to test all things (1 Thes 5:21)
- to take every thought captive (2 Cor 10:5).

A 'prayer language' that is not understood is

- 'unfruitful for the mind' (1 Cor 14:14)
- unverifiable (1 Cor 14:16)
- and therefore dangerous (1 Cor 12:3).

b) By definition, spiritual gifts are for others, not self (1 Cor 12:7) and to be exercised in love (1 Cor 13). Love requires others.

c) According to Ephesians 1:3, every believer has every spiritual blessing. If some (and it can only be some cf. 1 Cor 12:28-30) have a gift that they primarily use to enhance their own spiritual life, then it would seem not every Christian has every spiritual blessing. This rules out the possibility of some having a 'gift' that enhances their prayer life.

¹²⁴ "In his study of present day glossolalia, particularly in Pentecostalism, Samarin states, 'And it has already been established that no special power needs to take over a person's vocal organs; all of us are equipped with everything we need to produce glossolalia.' [William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels*, 1970] He also says, 'Glossolalia is not a supernatural phenomenon...It is similar to many other kinds of speech humans produce in more or less normal circumstances, in more or less normal psychological states. In fact anybody can produce glossolalia if he is uninhibited and if he discovers what the trick' is.'" (Edgar, p.144)

"Another scholar who has studied glossolalia, specifically in a Pentecostal setting, is Felicitas D. Goodman. She apparently does not relate glossolalia to the supernatural. Based on her research, it is common in many cultures and religions and can be self-induced. For many...Paul's glossolalia may be compared with that of shamans and pagan oracles." (Edgar, p.144, quoting Felicitas D. Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues*, 1972).

¹²⁵ "Summarizing what commandment is the greatest and foremost of all, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37-38; Deut. 6:5). Believers are to be transformed by the renewing of their mind (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10). Believers are to have the same humble, unselfish, serving attitude that was in Christ (Phil. 2:5) and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Believers are told what things we should think and dwell on (Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:2). Believers are to have a sound and sober (alert) mind (1 Pet. 1:13; 4:7). Likewise, God's Law is to be written on our minds (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). Furthermore, godly meditation (i.e., filling and focusing one's thoughts on God and His Word) is a characteristic of the spiritually minded (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; Col. 3:16)." James O'Loughlin, *The Truth about Speaking in Tongues*, Kindle Edition. Location 2496 of 6758

d) If uninterpreted tongues don't edify the church because they can't be understood, then neither can they edify the ones speaking them, even in private. (1 Cor 14).

e) 'Private prayer language' is contrary to the meaning of the word 'tongue', the example of tongues in Acts and the purpose of tongues as a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22).

4. Tongues were not evidence of the Spirit's filling or baptism

The Pentecostal movement claim that tongues are the initial evidence for the baptism of the Spirit. They claim that this is the teaching from the use of tongues in Acts and that the tongues in Corinthians refer to something different (often a private prayer language). The tongues in Acts are a 'sign' (of Spirit baptism), and the tongues in Corinthians are a 'gift' (ecstatic utterances, private prayer language etc.). This way, they can say that while not everyone has the gift of tongues (cf. 1 Cor 12:28-30), everyone baptised by the Spirit experiences the sign.

a) The tongues in Acts have the same nature and purpose as the tongues in 1 Corinthians. Nothing in either context indicates otherwise. If this is true, then the fact that not everyone has every gift (1 Cor 12:29f), yet all believers have the Spirit (Rom 8:9) and have been baptised with the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) means tongues can't be a sign of Spirit baptism.

b) The book of Acts, being historical, is more descriptive than prescriptive. Indeed it has much to teach the believer, but Acts also contains much that is transitional. There are many events in Acts that were unique and unrepeatable¹²⁶. Pentecost is one such event.

c) Most Pentecostals posit Spirit Baptism as a post-conversion experience. However, in Acts, of the five times people receive the Spirit (Acts 2, 4, 8, 10, 19), 2 are at conversion (Acts 10, 19), and 3 are post-conversion (Acts 2, 4, 8). If Acts is the paradigm for Spirit Baptism, why aren't all post-conversion experiences?

d) The Baptism of the Spirit is a free gift of God given to every believer at conversion (1 Cor 12:13). More than this, Spirit baptism places one into the body of Christ. Tongues, as a sign of such baptism, deny this truth.

5. Tongues were human languages in Acts but ecstatic utterances in Corinthians

The Pentecostals teach two kinds of tongues in the NT, one in Acts and the other in 1 Corinthians. This they do to defend their idea that tongues are the evidence of Spirit Baptism. Unfortunately, while not agreeing with this teaching, many continuationists also believe in two types of NT tongues. It seems they do this to escape the restrictive definition of tongues in Acts and make room for the tongues in 1 Corinthians to match their current experience¹²⁷.

¹²⁶ The appointment of the 12 Apostle (Acts 1), the community of goods (Acts 4), the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), the miraculous ministry of the Apostles (Acts 5), the supernatural transportation of Philip (Acts 8), the conversion of Saul (Acts 9), etc. etc.

¹²⁷ As with the gifts of miracles, healings and prophecy, I can't help but see continuationist teaching on the nature of the NT gifts as anachronistic to the core. They argue vehemently for sub-standard, non-supernatural 'gifts' in order to justify their quest for 'deeper life' experiences in their personal walk with Jesus. Alas I believe they are guilty of trivializing the gifts and with it the Giver.

a) The same word is used for 'tongues' in both passages. This remains the chief stumbling block for the entire continuationist position on tongues.

b) There is no indication in either book that the gift is different. Nowhere is the meaning of tongues redefined, either in Acts or in 1 Corinthians. Some suggest there are 'hints' in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 that indicate a difference:

- 1 Corinthians was a cosmopolitan city. There would have been church members who understood tongues without an interpreter. 1 Corinthians 14 doesn't seem to consider this possibility; in fact, it says that 'no one understands' the tongue¹²⁸.

Response: 'No one understands' uninterpreted tongues simply means under normal circumstances. It is not meant to be a technical categorical statement. Normally, in church, most, if not all people, would not understand the tongues speaker. That there 'might' be someone in the city (or church) who understood the tongues speaker is an argument from silence and pure conjecture.

- 1 Cor 14:10-11, the nature of tongues is compared to a human language. "Something is not usually identical to that with which it is said to be analogous."¹²⁹

Response: the analogies do not explain the nature of tongues; they describe the frustration of uninterpreted tongues. Like musical instruments with no discernable notes or trying to communicate with people who speak a different language, uninterpreted tongues are unhelpful.

- Paul talks about 'different kinds of tongues' in 1 Cor 12:10. "It is unlikely he means a variety of different human languages, for who would have argued that all tongues were only one human language...His words suggest that there are different categories of glossolalia, perhaps at minimum human languages and heavenly languages."¹³⁰

Response: Different kinds of human languages make perfect sense in 1 Cor 12:10. To read it as a different form of language has no biblical precedent.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Sam Storms, Four Views, p.221

¹²⁹ Saucy, p.131 fn 57

¹³⁰ Storms, p.220

¹³¹ Other arguments from Storms (Four Views, pp.221-222) include: (1) if tongues are human languages, the gift of interpretation would need no supernatural work of the Spirit, a multi-lingual person could do it. **Response:** there was never a guarantee that someone in the congregation would understand the foreign language of a tongue speaker. There was therefore no need to make provision for such. Also, the ability to interpret a language you don't know seems pretty supernatural to me! (2) tongues of angels in 1 Corinthians 13:1 might refer to heavenly languages. **Response:** even if it did (it probably doesn't) it would be a discernible language with structure, something modern tongues doesn't have. (3) Paul said he spoke in tongues more than them all, "why would Paul speak more than all the Corinthians in private, where no one would understand, rather than in church where foreign visitors could understand?" **Response:** where does it say Paul spoke tongues in private? Paul spoke in tongues outside the church, just as believers did in Acts. Being the master missionary, God gave him an amazing ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages across the Roman world. (4) 14:23 doesn't hold true if tongues were foreign languages for some church visitor might understand the language! **Response:** As before, most if not all visitors wouldn't understand the tongue, and so they would think the speaker insane. Storms once again argues from unlikely hypotheticals, which indeed he must given the weakness of his case.

c) The tongues in Acts 19 occurred about the same time as 1 Corinthians was written, AD 56. So historically, the phenomenon of tongues in both books occurred contemporaneously. More than this, the Apostle Paul was present in Acts 19 and wrote First Corinthians. When you factor in that Paul used the same word to describe tongues as Luke used in Acts 19, it would be very strange if they referred to two different things.

Conclusion

The gift of tongues referred to the ability to speak in unlearned foreign languages. This is very evident from:

- The word used for tongues, glossa, which always in the NT and elsewhere referred either to the physical tongue or human languages;
- The definition of tongues in Acts 2:4 as human languages;
- The tongues in Acts 10 being connected to those in Acts 2;
- The fact that the usual definition of the word works better in 1 Corinthians than any other suggested alternative;
- The linking of tongues to foreign languages in 1 Corinthians 14:21;
- The purpose of tongues as a sign of blessing to Gentiles and a sign of judgment on unbelieving Israel (cf. 1 Cor 14:21);
- The fact that no alternative is exegetically feasible.

Chapter 7 – A Response to Continuationist Arguments

I. No NT texts say the gifts have ceased or will cease in this age

Response 1 – It's a matter of deduction

Response 2 – The continuationist's argument is based on deduction

II. The gifts will continue till Jesus returns (1 Cor 13; Eph 4)

Response 1 – What gifts? Not those claimed today!

Response 2 – 1 Corinthians 13 doesn't rule out cessation in the church age

Response 3 - Some gifts were foundational

III. Believers are to emulate the supernatural ministry of Jesus and the Apostles

Response 1 – Description doesn't imply prescription

Response 2 – The supernatural Apostolic Age was unique

IV. Spiritual gifts are necessary for the health of the church (1 Cor 12)

Response 1 - They were, but not now

Response 2 – Ministry to one-another is necessary for the health of the church

Conclusion

I. No NT texts say the gifts have ceased or will cease in this age

“In light of the consistent, multifaceted testimony of the Scriptures, the burden of proof is clearly on the side of the cessationists, since they must tell us where the Word of God states plainly that the normal, expected, and encouraged practice found in the New Testament is not to be the normal, expected, and encouraged practice today.”¹³²
(Michael Brown)

Response 1 – It's A Matter of Deduction

Simply because there are no explicit statements regarding a doctrine doesn't mean it is not taught by Scripture. Take, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity. It is not explicitly stated in the Bible; it's a truth deduced from it. The same is true of cessationism.

Response 2 – Continuationists Use Deduction to Argue Their Case

Charismatics use a lot of deduction to defend their understanding of the nature of individual spiritual gifts. For example, where in the Bible does it state that legitimate NT prophets could get prophecies wrong or that tongues are ecstatic utterances?

So, the question is not, 'where are the explicit statements in Scripture?' But, 'what do the Scriptures (as a whole) teach?'

¹³² Michael Brown, *Authentic Fire: A Response to John MacArthur's Strange Fire*, p.171

II. The gifts will continue until Jesus returns (1 Cor 13:8-13; Eph 4:11-16)

“We must also take note of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. Here Paul asserts that spiritual gifts will not “pass away” (vs. 8-10) until the coming of the “perfect.” If the “perfect” is indeed the consummation of God’s redemptive purposes as expressed in the new heaven and new earth following Christ’s return, we can confidently expect him to continue blessing and empowering his church with the gifts until that time...A similar point is made in Ephesians 4:11-13.¹³³” (Sam Storms)

Response 1 – What Gifts?

What gifts do the continuationists think will continue until the Lord returns? As has been stated previously but bears repeating, the NT only speaks of ‘high quality’ supernatural gifts. There were no ‘lesser gifts’ in the NT. Such ‘lesser gifts’ like fallible prophecy and ecstatic utterances can’t continue until the Lord returns because they are not and never were legitimate.

Response 2 – 1 Corinthians 13 doesn’t rule out cessation in the church age.

Though some cessationists make a good case that the ‘perfect’ in 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to either the completion of the Scriptures or the maturity of the church¹³⁴, it seems the reference is to the eternal state.¹³⁵ The evidence includes: (1) The phrase ‘Face to face’ (v.12) most naturally indicates being in the Lord’s presence, especially in light of its OT usage; (2) the degree of self-knowledge anticipated (‘fully known’ v.12) can only be fulfilled when in the presence of the Lord; In addition, if the perfect did refer to Scripture does it mean we today have greater insight than the Apostle Paul?; (3) it is tough to see how the idea of completed Scripture would have made sense to the Corinthians; (4) there will be prophecy in the tribulation (Joel 2; Rev 11). Therefore, the perfect must refer to something that happens after this.

The coming of the perfect seems to end prophecy and knowledge¹³⁶. Yet Paul was not just talking about the church age. His scope was broader, for we know that prophecy will exist after the church age. So the idea would be that prophecy ceased during the church age, will be revived during the Tribulation Period then brought to an end with the return of Christ to set up his kingdom.

Response 3 – Foundational Gifts Helped the Church Become Mature

In Ephesians 4, the unique foundational ministry of the Apostles and Prophets helped the church move towards maturity. We know Apostles are no longer in the church today, so this opens the possibility that others (like Prophets) in the Ephesians 4:11-16 list are also no longer around. Indeed, the two overlapping phases of NT leadership can be seen in this list. The temporary Apostles and Prophets founded the church, followed by the evangelists and Pastor/Teachers who built on that foundation.

¹³³ Sam Storms, “Why I Am A Continuationist”, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/continuationist/>

¹³⁴ Their strongest arguments include: (1) Of the 18x the word ‘perfect’ is used in the NT, never is it used of Christ or heaven. It means, ‘complete’ or ‘mature’; (2) Partial divine revelation is being contrasted with something complete – full divine revelation; and (3) ‘Mirror’, ‘face’ and ‘perfect’ are used of looking at Scripture in James 1:23-25.

¹³⁵ or at least the moment when believers will be with the Lord

¹³⁶ The middle voice of the verb used with tongues indicates they could cease of themselves. See Dan Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, p.422 where he masterfully argues for such an interpretation.

Ken Berding has an attractive proposal. Rather than a list of people with special abilities, he argues this is a list of people in equipping ministries. The ministry, not the people with special abilities, is the gift to the church. If this is true, those serving in evangelistic, pastoral and teaching ministries are there to bring the church to maturity after the foundational work of the Apostles and Prophets. This also helps to explain why ‘Pastor’ is not listed anywhere else as a spiritual gift.¹³⁷

III. Believers are to emulate the supernatural ministry of Jesus and the Apostles

“Since we share the same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus and his followers in the first century, why not let them be our models for what is possible in the Christian life? After all, on more than one occasion Jesus taught that “everything is possible for him who believes” (Mark 9:23; Matt. 21:21-22; Mark 11:23).¹³⁸” (Jack Deere)

Response 1 – Description v Prescription

While everything in the Bible is descriptive, not everything is prescriptive. Work must be done to show how any portion of Scripture transcends its immediate audience and impacts the reader. Remember all the transitional passages and events tabled previously from John 14-16 and Acts?

Concerning specific texts used by continuationists to validate their point, they often “don’t mean what they think they mean’!” Here are just a couple of examples:

Jesus, in John 14:12, said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” Some Charismatics want to suggest Jesus was referring to his supernatural ministry. The problem is that no one has come close to emulating Jesus’ supernatural ministry. He must have been talking about the ability of believers to be used to bring people to faith.

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ”. Again, some Charismatics suggest that since Paul made no caveats, imitating his example is the ability to do signs and wonders (cf. 2 Cor 12:12). Yet Paul’s miraculous abilities were connected to his role as an Apostle to the Gentiles. In context, Paul is talking about his conduct before unbelievers. Whether he ate or drank, he did all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31) and was careful in exercising his liberty not to be a stumbling block to anyone (1 Cor 10:23-33). On the other hand, the Corinthians seemed to enjoy exercising their freedom in Christ (as they understood it) in such a way that it caused great harm (see chapters 5, 6, 7, 8-10, 11, 14). Thus, Paul calls the Corinthians to emulate his example.

Paul, in Philippians 4:9, said, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice.” The argument goes that they would have seen Paul’s miraculous abilities and were commanded to emulate such. Context once again suggests otherwise. Nowhere in this letter does Paul refer to supernatural gifts. He does refer to his patient, hopeful endurance while in prison (chapter 1), his selfless

¹³⁷ Kenneth Berding, *What Are the Spiritual Gifts?*

¹³⁸ Jack Deere, “Surprised by the Voice of God,” p.

care for the Philippians (chapter 2 – being poured out as a drink offering), and his desire to forget what has happened and press on to the goal of maturity in Christ (chapter 3) and his desire for church unity (chapter 4). This would seem more than enough for the Philippians to seek to emulate.

Response 2 – The Supernatural Aspects of the Apostolic Age Were Unique

I have argued previously for the unique nature of the Apostolic Age on the grounds it was transitional, foundational and historically unique.

IV. Spiritual gifts are necessary for the health of the church (1 Cor 12)

“We must also give room to the explicit and oft-repeated purpose of the charismata: namely, the edification of Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:7; 14:3, 26). Nothing I read in the NT or see in the condition of the church in any age, past or present, leads me to believe we’ve progressed beyond the need for edification—and therefore beyond the need for the contribution of the charismata.¹³⁹” (Sam Storms)

Response 1 – They Were, But Not Now

The actual supernatural gifts were necessary for the transitional period. They helped establish the church and were used to guide her in the absence of completed Scripture. The first century was a unique age characterised by unique spiritual gifting. Lesser ‘supernatural’ gifts from the Spirit never existed. So the charismatic claims to be edifying the church by using ‘supernatural’ gifts are empty.

Response 2 – Ministry to one another is necessary for the health of the church

The principle of body life outlined in 1 Corinthians 12 is essential to a healthy church, with or without spiritual gifts. A well-functioning church recognises that it needs people with different competencies working together for the common good. The focus in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is on the church working together as a body for the common good. This purpose is not dependent on believers having special God-given abilities. As Gene Getz wrote, “Body function is not dependent on spiritual gifts, but rather on biblical teaching and a love and concern for one another.¹⁴⁰” It is the ‘one-anothers’ in Scripture that promote healthy body life. Indeed, this is the point of 1 Corinthians 13. Love, way more than spiritual gifts, is the essential element for a fruitful and faithful church.

If healthy body function depended on spiritual gifts, why aren’t elders and deacons chosen based on possessing gifts that would help them in their task? Elders are to lead and teach, while deacons and deaconesses are to serve. These are their primary tasks. Would it not make sense then to have the spiritual gifts of leadership, teaching and serving included in the list of qualifications for these roles (cf. 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1)?

Further, have churches today managed to define what each NT gift entailed? If so, how, for the Bible is very vague on the definition of most gifts. How, therefore, can anyone be sure that the gift they think they have is equivalent to the NT gift? In addition, what evidence is there of people exhibiting abilities (or significantly enhanced abilities) post-conversion that they didn’t have pre-conversion? It seems the church is substantially better off talking about ministry opportunities rather than spiritual gifts. To this end, I again commend

¹³⁹ Sam Storms, “Why I Am A Continuationist”, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/continuationist/>

¹⁴⁰ Gene Getz, “Sharpening the Focus of the Church”, p.162

Kenneth Berding, who argues well that all but one of the lists of ‘spiritual gifts’ in the NT refer to ministries, not special abilities¹⁴¹.

A significant factor in favour of such a view is how the NT makes it clear that all believers are commanded to do the tasks of service labelled ‘general spiritual gifts’.

Spiritual Gift given to some	Biblical command given to the church
Teaching	- Elders must be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2)
Pastoring	- Elders are to be good shepherds (1 Pet 5:1-4)
Evangelism	- Jesus’ disciples are to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20)
Faith	- Without faith, a believer can’t please God (Heb 11:6)
Helps/Serving	- Look out for the interests of others (Philip 2:3-4)
Encouragement	- Encourage one another (1 Thes 5:11)
Giving	- Be a generous giver (2 Cor 8-9)
Leadership	- Elders are to rule well (1 Tim 3:4-5; 5:17)
Mercy	- Be merciful or be judged! (James 2:12-13)

Conclusion

If ‘this is not that’, if the claimed gifts of charismatics today are not the same as those in the NT, their case comes crashing down. They are cessationists because they don’t believe people today exhibit the giftedness of Jesus and the Apostles. This means they too need to answer the question, why? Why did such high-level, dramatic spiritual giftedness cease? Why, if the church started with such a bang and such gifted individuals, do we not see the same degree of the supernatural happening today through individuals?

Why would God start the church with men who:

- performed amazing miracles and healings in public,
- who spoke in languages they hadn’t learnt,
- and who prophesied accurately,

only then to have them followed, 2000 years later, with those who:

- sometimes did minor ‘miracles’ behind closed doors,
- spoke in ecstatic utterances like many pagans
- and claimed to prophesy truth mixed with error?

Does that really sound like how the one true God operates? Does that reflect how we see God working among his people in the Scriptures?

¹⁴¹ Kenneth Berding, What Are the Spiritual Gifts.

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