

AIM

To demonstrate the fundamental distinction between "Signs and Wonders" and the "New Testament Charismata," and the implications of this distinction.

APPROACH

For maximum clarity, the author has divided the subject matter into three parts, and included an appendix for additional clarification.

In part one, the author will examine the usage and theological significance of "signs," of "wonders," and of "Signs and Wonders" in the Old Testament and New Testament. The author will examine the theological significance of the New Testament Charismata, and offer a summary conclusion.

In part two, the author will illustrate the distinctions made in part one, by examining the charismata of healings and miracles, and then offer a summary conclusion.

In part three, the author will propose an application of the paper's findings to the contemporary theological scene.

In the appendix, the author will offer a brief perspective on Heb.2:4. I Cor. 13:8-12, and tongues, based upon the perspective adopted in this paper.

PART ONE: SIGNS AND WONDERS

I. SIGNS

A. Old Testament Usage of "Sign"

The Hebrew word for "sign" is אֵימֹת ('*owth*). אֵימֹת ('*owth*') appears over eighty times in the Old Testament, almost half of which are in the Pentateuch. Generally, its usage "aims at conceptual clarification by means of impressions."¹ These clarifications are designed to inform, and

¹G. Kittel, Ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 7,

the impressions used are normally miraculous.² In other words, a miracle designed to communicate. In fact, "most of the eighty occurrences of אֵימֹת refer to miraculous signs,"³ which are designed to communicate a divine message,⁴ or give divine credentials to an individual.⁵

B. New Testament Usage of "Sign"

The greek word for "sign" is $\sigma\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ (*sēmēiōn*). $\sigma\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ (*sēmēiōn*) in the New Testament corresponds very closely to אֵימֹת ('*owth*') in the Old Testament. In fact, the LXX usually uses $\sigma\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ (*sēmēiōn*) as a translation for אֵימֹת ('*owth*').⁶ One of the most significant features of $\sigma\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ (*sēmēiōn*) in the New Testament, in contrast to אֵימֹת ('*owth*') in the Old Testament, is its emphasis on being a visual, divine authentication for an individual.⁷ However, $\sigma\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ (*sēmēiōn*) can be used in a broader sense.⁸

Ed. Friedrich, Gerhard, Trans. and Ed. Bromiley, Geoffrey W., (W. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids; MI, 1971): 219.

²Some examples are: Moses before Pharaoh (Ex. 4:4-30; 10:1-2), the Exodus events (Ex. 7:3-5; Num 14:11; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; 34:11; Josh. 24:17; Psa. 78:23; 105:27; 135:9; Neh. 9:10; Jer. 32:17), the sign against Korah vindicating Moses (Num. 16:38; 26:10), Eli's sons (1 Sam. 2:34), Hezekiah's life lengthened (2 Kng. 20:8-11; Isa. 38:7, 22), God's curse on Israel (Deut. 28:46; Ex. 4:3; 12:6-11; 14:8; 24:24-27), Daniel in the lion's den (Dan. 6:27), and in nature (Jer. 10:2; Joel 2:30).

³Laird R. Harris, Ed. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1 (Hoody: Chicago; IL 1980), 18.

⁴Some exceptions are: circumcision (Gen. 17:11), the Sabbath (Ex. 31:13, 17; 20:12, 20), phylacteries (Deut. 6:8; 11:18), the twelve stones (Josh. 4:6), a smoke signal (Jud. 20:38), Rahab's request (Josh 2:12), and a banner (Num. 2:2).

⁵The most notable example is Moses (Ex. 4:4-30; Deut. 34:11, etc.)

⁶Kittel, Vol. 7, 219.

⁷Pharisee's requesting one (Mat. 12:38-39; 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12; Luke 11:16-30; John 2:18; 6:30), confirming Jesus (John 2:11; 2:23 - 3:2; 6:2; 6:14; 6:26; 7:31; 9:16; 12:18; 12:37; 20:30; Acts 2:22), confirming Apostles (Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19), confirming the lawless one (2 Thea. 2:9; Rev 13:13), and confirming false Christs (Mat. 24:24; Mark 13:22).

⁸For example: Jesus birth (Luke 2:12, 34), Judas' kiss (Mat. 26:48), circumcision (Rom. 4:11), a ship's figure head (Acts 28:11), tongues (1 Cor. 14:22), events surrounding Christ's Second Coming (Mat. 24:3, 30; Mark

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1:22-23). Again, "signs and wonders" in this context are tied directly to the doctrine of revelation in that Isaiah and his children are to be a "sign and wonder" to Israel. God is communicating through Isaiah and his children to Israel. Again there are several events labelled under "signs and wonder."

In the above examples, "signs and wonders" are used as a sort of label, or catch phrase for God's revelation through an individual. In the process, both the message and the messenger are given a sort of divine stamp of approval. Therefore, in conclusion, the combination of "signs and wonders" in the Old Testament acts as an authenticating stamp upon a revelatory message and messenger.

B. New Testament Usages of "Signs and Wonders"

The New Testament writers use the combination σημεῖον καὶ τέρατα (*sēmēiōn kai tērata*) 18 times,¹⁴ and according to Kittel, it "very obviously fulfills an indispensable function in the New Testament."¹⁵ This function according to Alford, is the divine confirmation of human testimony.¹⁶ In expanding the confirming role of σημεῖον καὶ τέρατα (*sēmēiōn kai tērata*) in the New Testament, Kittel remarks,

sēmēiōn kai tērata is to be taken as a fixed expression. Hence the two words combined here are not to be interpreted separately but as a unity. The usage of the Christian community is unmistakable here. An important point, as in the picture of Jesus in the Synoptics and Paul's view of an Apostle, is that the reference to the *sēmēiōn kai tērata* is to the credibility of the preacher.¹⁷

In this sense, the New Testament writers are clearly borrowing this phrase from the Old Testament authors. Thus, in order to understand the New Testament usage of the phrase, it is imperative to understand the Old

¹⁴ Mat. 24:24; Mark 13:22; John 4:48; Acts 2:22; 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:13; 14:3; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12; 2 Thes 2:9; Heb. 2:4.

¹⁵ Kittel, Vol. 8, 124.

¹⁶ Henry Alford, *Hebrews-Revelation The Greek New Testament*, Vol. 4. (Moody Press; Chicago, IL 1958), 30.

¹⁷ Kittel, Vol 8, 260.

Testament usage of this phrase. This has been observed to be an authenticating stamp or label marking the revelatory message and its messenger. Therefore, one may detect the New Testament writers making a direct link between the accrediting nature of the miracle wrought by God in the Old Testament and the miracles that were taking place in their own day by Jesus and the Apostles.

That "signs and wonders" are an authenticating stamp by God upon a message and messenger can be determined by surveying the New Testament data. First of all, Acts 2:22 gives clear evidence to this usage. It reads, "Men of Israel, listen to these words; Jesus the Nazarene, a man accredited to you by God through miracles and wonders and signs, which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know." Here, "signs and wonders" combined with "miracles" are clearly said to be the accreditation of Jesus' ministry.¹⁸ Second, the Apostles performed "signs and wonders,"¹⁹ and in so doing were accredited by God in 2 Cor. 12:12 and Heb. 2:4.²⁰ Third, Moses is referred to as having done "signs and wonders,"²¹ which authenticated him. Fourth, Philip and Stephen are said to have done "signs and wonders,"²² and while they are not specifically said to have been authenticated by "signs and wonders," the context in Acts 6 and 8 combined with the other 14 New Testament occurrences, certainly suggests that "signs and wonders" played an authenticating role in their ministries. Fifth, prophetically speaking, "signs and wonders" are going to serve as an authenticating stamp for false Christs and messiahs,²³ and

¹⁸ Interestingly, Jesus rebuked the Jews for needing "signs and wonders" in order to believe (John 4:48). Obviously, from the Jewish perspective "signs and wonders" would have been an authentication for Jesus being from God. It's almost ironic that this is Peter's argument for Jesus' authentication in Acts 2:22.

¹⁹ Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 14:13; 15:12; Rom. 15:19; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4.

²⁰ See appendix B for interpretive remarks on Heb. 2:4.

²¹ Acts 7:36-37. Kittel sees a definite typological relationship between Moses and Jesus being accredited by "signs and wonders" in this text (Vol. 8, 242).

²² Acts 6:8; 8:13.

²³ Mat. 24:24; Mark 13:22.

First, there is a distinction as to when each is operative. "Signs and wonders" bridges both testaments. It is used in the Old Testament for Moses and a few others, and in the New Testament for Jesus, the Apostles, and a few others. On the other hand *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) is strictly a New Testament phenomena, even more, it is limited to the Church. Therefore, one would not want to say that Jesus had the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*), as it has been defined.

Second, there is a distinction as to distribution. "Signs and wonders" was given to a few select individuals. The manifestation of the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) on the other hand, is given to every member of the body of Christ.

Third, there is a distinction in purpose. "Signs and wonders" is a fixed expression for the divine authentication of a messenger and his message. The *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) on the other hand, is for the edification of the church.

Therefore, it is the contention of this author that there is a basic distinction between these two concepts. In maintaining this, there are two necessary points which need to be noted. First, the sign nature of the gift of Tongues is to be distinguished from "signs and wonders" on the general distinctions which have already been made.³² Second, the Apostles are unique in history in that they were divinely authenticated by "signs and wonders," and that they were part of the body of Christ, and therefore, were given a manifestation of the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*). It is the contention of this author that because most scholars have not observed this fundamental distinction between "signs and wonders" and the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*), particularly in the lives of the Apostles, but have tended to view the "signs and wonders" of the Apostles as manifesting a spiritual gift of healing, or some other *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*), that much confusion has resulted for the Church down through the centuries concerning the miraculous working of God.

³² See Appendix C for further details.

In this section, it is the aim of the author to demonstrate the distinctions made in "Part One" in the lives of the Apostles. This will be accomplished by examining the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) of healings and the *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) of miracles (1 Cor. 12:9-10), in contrast to *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα* (*sēmēlia kai tērata*) healings and miracles.

I. HEALING

It is the contention of this author that the New Testament presents three forms of divine healing. First, there are *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα* (*sēmēlia kai tērata*) healings. These are literal, immediate, and miraculous healings performed in connection with the authentication of a messenger of God. Second, there are *χαρίσματα* (*charismata*) healings. These healings are generally (though not exclusively) spiritual, emotional, or psychological healings. Third, there are miraculous (though not always immediate) healings in answer to prayer. The author will now examine each of these forms of healings.

A. Signs and Wonder Healings

The divine authentication of Jesus and his witnesses in the New Testament is directly tied to the miracles which they performed. In "Part One" these miracles were shown to be labelled by the New Testament writers as *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα* (*sēmēlia kai tērata*).³³ It is noteworthy that the majority of the *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα* (*sēmēlia kai tērata*) wrought by Jesus and his witnesses were miracles of healing. In fact, in the lives of Jesus' witnesses this is exclusively the case. Therefore, this author deems it appropriate to label the miraculous healings of Jesus and his witnesses as *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα* (*sēmēlia kai tērata*) which authenticated their ministry. However, it needs to be pointed out that in the life of Jesus there were several non-healing *σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα* (*sēmēlia kai tērata*), such as the

³³ Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:13; 14:3; 15:12.

the "gifts of healings" understood as it has been presented here, then a clear consistent picture of healing in the New Testament church (and one that fits well today) emerges. Miraculous healing is to be sought by prayer (James 5), and emotional, spiritual, and psychological healing (1 Cor. 12:9), is to be sought from an individual who is gifted in that particular area (i.e. a counselor). As for "signs and wonders" healing, this is limited to God's special authentication of a messenger with his message and is extremely rare even in Scripture.

II. MIRACLES

In the opinion of this author, the so-called "gift of miracles," has, like the "gift of healings," been seriously misunderstood. In fact, the author will demonstrate that this gift is not even a reference to an individual working miracles, but rather to an energizing spiritual strength. However, for systematic clarity, the author will treat first the miraculous σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (*sēmēlia kai tērata*), second, the so-called "gift of miracles," and third, miracles in answer to prayer.

A. Sign and Wonder Miracles

Here, the author is not concerned with healing σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (*sēmēlia kai tērata*), since those were discussed in the last section, but rather, is concerned with miraculous "signs and wonders" in the world of nature. For the most part, this type of "signs and wonders" seem to be limited to Moses, Elijah, and Elisha⁴⁰ and Jesus. The Egyptian plagues under Moses, Elijah's fire from heaven, Elisha's swimming axe-head, and Jesus calming the storm are examples. All these are clearly spectacular "signs and wonders," and were performed in connection with the divine authentication of their ministry.

⁴⁰ Although Scripture does not specifically designate the miracles of Elijah and Elisha as "signs and wonders," they certainly fit the description, and may be considered under the general category.

B. The Gift of Miracles

In the viewpoint of this author, the common translation of ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων (*ēnergēmata dunamēōn*), as "gifts of working of miracles," is most unfortunate. This is true for several reasons. (1) The "words deriving from the stem δυνα- all have the basic meaning of being able," of 'capacity' in virtue of ability . . . the stress falls on being able"⁴¹ not the performance of miracles! (2) The word's most common usage in secular literature is not connected with miracles but with natural abilities.⁴² (3) While the term is used in the New Testament for the working of a miracle, it is more often used for a non-miraculous ability or power.⁴³ (4) When ἐνεργία (*ēnergia*) is used with δύναμις (*dunamis*), it most often refers to God's provision of Spiritual strength for the believer.⁴⁴ Therefore, one is not of necessity forced to read a miraculous element into this gift. In fact, it is more consistent with secular, and New Testament usage of δύναμις (*dunamis*) to leave out the miraculous element.

This author prefers to translate the phrase as "gifts of energizing powers." The proposed significance being much akin to the "gift of faith." In other words, just as everyone is given a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3), but not all are given the "gift of faith" (1 Cor. 12:9), so likewise, all believers are given spiritual strength (2 Tim. 1:7), but not all are given the "gift of energizing powers" (1 Cor. 12:10). This understanding is significant in light of Colin Brown's description of δύναμις (*dunamis*) having a "relative" and "absolute" use. He asserts that this word used "relatively" refers to an inherent ability or capacity to perform a task, and used "absolutely," it refers to power given to work, or to carry something into effect.⁴⁵ The picture becomes clear. This gift is a spiritual capacity given to an individual to work, presumably in some sort of ministry.

⁴¹ Kittel, Vol. 2, 284.

⁴² Brown, Vol. 3, 65.

⁴³ Vine, 11.

⁴⁴ Cf. Eph. 3:7; 3:20; Col. 1:29; possibly Gal. 3:5.

⁴⁵ Brown, Vol. 3, 65.

ANSWERS TO CRUCIAL QUESTIONS IN 13:8-13

	VIEW 1a	VIEW 1b	VIEW 2	VIEW 3
13:8 When do the three gifts cease?	Prophecy and knowledge are revelatory; tongues are confirmatory; all 3 cease with canon.	Prophecy and knowledge are revelatory; tongues are confirmatory; only tongues cease with canon.	Prophecy and knowledge are revelatory; tongues are nonconfirmatory; all 3 remain to parousia.	Prophecy and knowledge are revelatory; tongues are confirmatory; all 3 cease with canon.
13:10 What is τὸ τέλειον?	the canon	the canon	the parousia	the body
13:11 What does growth to manhood represent?	before and after completed canon	before and after completed canon	before and after parousia	before and after body's maturity (as indicated by canon)
13:12 What are partial and full sight and knowledge?	before and after completed canon	before and after completed canon	before and after parousia	before and after body's maturity (as completed by parousia)
13:12a What is comparison between gifts and virtues?	period after to canon with entire age	entire age with period following parousia	entire age with period following parousia	period prior to maturity (canon) with entire age
13:12b How is love superior?	Group of 3 virtues ceases at parousia, but not love.	qualitative superior to 3 virtues as a group	qualitative superior to 3 virtues as a group	Group of 3 virtues ceases at parousia, but not love

It is proper to note that Thomas himself subscribes to View 3. However, this writer prefers View 2, with notable exceptions on 13:8 and 10. Concerning 13:8, this author has no problem with prophecy and knowledge being revelatory and functioning today (See Appendix D). Tongues on the other hand are non-revelatory, but do serve a confirmatory role (See Appendix C). Concerning the significance of 13:10, View 3 is certainly correct in linking τὸ τέλειον (τὸ τέλειον) "the perfect" in this passage with τὸ τέλειον (τὸ τέλειον) in Ephesians 4:13. However, it is the contention of this author that the full maturity of the body can only represent the entire glorified body with the Lord Jesus at the parousia. This

corresponds much better with full insight and knowledge (13:12, View 2).

Before summing up, an additional comment is necessary on the significance of the middle voice in παύσονται (pausōntai) "will cease" (13:8). Many fine expositors have understood this to be a reference to tongues ceasing by themselves, prior to the cessation of prophecy and knowledge. However, this notion has been manifestly shown to be in error.⁴⁶ In fact, Carson labels this, "the most common fallacy in connection with the middle voice."⁴⁷ This point is hardly worth belaboring, it is mentioned only because one occasionally finds a strong advocate of it.

In summary, it is the view of this author that prophecy and knowledge are revelatory, while tongues are not. Tongues do however have a confirmatory element. All three gifts will remain to the parousia. τὸ τέλειον (τὸ τέλειον) "the perfect" is a reference to the complete body of Christ at the parousia. The growth process (13:11), represents the Church's gradual maturing process, which one glad day will be complete at the parousia. Full insight and knowledge, that is, face to face knowing as we are known (13:12), must certainly be understood in terms of the Church meeting Christ at the parousia. The virtues, in contrast to the gifts, will alone continue after the parousia, this is obviously the case in view of each one's purpose. Gifts are for the edification and growth of the body, therefore, when the body is complete, the gifts no longer have a purpose and thus cease. However, the virtues are the abiding results. In short, the Apostle is contrasting his present experience (and the present experience of every member of the body of Christ), with what he will experience at the parousia.

B. HEBREWS 2:4

This verse deserves special attention from the standpoint of the distinctions made in Part One of this paper. This is the case, because in most English translations, it appears as if χαρίσματα (charismata) is linked with σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (sēmēia kai tērata) as an authenticating mark

⁴⁶ D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*. (Baker: Grand Rapids: MI 1984). 77-79.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 79.

objective or subjective genitive, for neither view affects, with any significance, the distinctions made in Part One.

C. The Gift of Tongues

It is not the author's purpose to treat exhaustively the complexities surrounding this much debated gift. Rather, it is the intention of the author to discuss the significance of "tongues" being a σημεῖον (*sēmēiōn*) as per 1 Cor. 14:22, and to examine what possible significance this may have upon the distinctions made in Part One.

It is clear from a comparison of Acts and 1 Corinthians that the gift of tongues has a dual function. On the other hand, it serves as a confirmatory sign of God's new program of joining Jew, Samaritan, and Gentile into one body, and on the other hand, it is used to edify the body, just like every other Charismata. This has led many expositors to understand that there are two different kinds of tongues in the New Testament. However, this is unlikely when one considers that the author of Acts was a travelling companion, and in effect a disciple of Paul who wrote 1 Corinthians. In other words, Luke probably learned what he knew about tongues from Paul, and it is therefore probable that each is referring to differing aspects of the same gift.⁵⁴ Therefore, tongues has a dual function, one as a sign to unbelievers, and one as an edifying χαρίσματα [*charismata*] to believers.

Therefore, since "tongues" is both a "sign" (1 Cor. 14:22) and a Charismata (1 Cor. 12:10), what resulting ramifications does this have upon the distinctions made in Part One? In the opinion of this author, none! This is true for several reasons: (1) never are tongues called σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα (*sēmēia kai tērata*); (2) "tongues" are clearly a χαρίσματα [*charismata*]; (3) σημεῖον (*sēmēiōn*) has a wide usage apart from being connected with τέρας (*tēras*), as was noted in Part One; (4) "tongues" are never used to authenticate the ministry and message of an individual like "signs and wonders;" (5) "tongues" are unique to the church age, unlike "signs and wonders;" (6) "tongues" are used by many individuals, unlike

⁵⁴ Dr. C. Fred Dickason, Chairman of Theology, Moody Bible Institute. Personal interview, April 6, 1990.

"signs and wonders." Therefore, it is clear that even though "tongues" have a dual role, consisting of a confirming sign and an edifying gift, it is not to be equated, in any fashion, with "signs and wonders." Therefore, the distinctions made in Part One of this paper remain consistent.

D. THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

This author's understanding of the gift of prophecy follows closely that of Dr. John Piper, pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Since his work is considered by this writer to be concise and accurate, it will be reproduced here at length:

THESES

1. It is still valid and useful for the church today. This is the clear implication of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 and Acts 2:17-18.
2. It is Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained, utterance that is rooted in revelation (1 Cor. 14:30), but is fallible because of the prophet's perception of the revelation and thinking about the revelation and report of the revelation are all fallible. It is thus similar to the gift of teaching which is Spirit-prompted, Spirit-sustained, rooted in an infallible revelation (the Bible), and yet is fallible but very useful to the church.
3. It does not have an authority that is on a par with Scripture, for Scripture is verbally inspired, not just Spirit-prompted and Spirit-sustained. The very words of the Biblical writers are the words of God (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16). This is not true of the words that come from the gift of prophecy.
4. The New Testament gift of prophecy is a "third category" of utterance between the categories of 1) verbally inspired, intrinsically authoritative, infallible speech spoken by the likes of Moses, Jesus, and the Apostles; and 2) the speech of false prophets spoken presumptuously, without inspiration and liable to condemnation (Deut. 18:20). Those two categories (absolutely infallible vs. false) do not exhaust all the Biblical teaching on prophecy.

DEFINITION

Prophecy is this "third category" (the New Testament gift of prophecy) is a regulated (1 Cor. 14:32) message or report in human words (1 Cor. 14:3, 29; Acts 2:4, 11) usually made to the gathered believers (1 Cor. 14:4) based on a spontaneous, personal revelation from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 14:30; Luke 7:39; 22:64; John 4:19) for the purpose of edification, encouragement, consolation, conviction, or guidance (1 Cor. 14:3, 24-25; Acts 21:4; 16:6-10) but not necessarily free from a mixture of human error, and thus needing assessment (1 Ths. 5:19-20; 1 Cor. 14:29) on the basis of apostolic (Biblical) teaching (1 Cor. 14:36-38) and mature spiritual wisdom (Col. 1:9).