

*"...holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."
2 Peter 3:21*

WHY DOESN'T GOD TALK WITH US TODAY?

**UNDERSTANDING THE REAL POWER
OF GOD'S WRITTEN WORD**



“And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great
and strong wind tore into the mountains and
broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but
the LORD was not in the wind; and after the
wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the
earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the
LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire,
a still small voice.”

~ 1 Kings 19:11-12

Why Doesn't God Talk With Us Today?

Understanding the real power of God's written word

It makes sense, if there is a God in heaven, that He would want to communicate with us and tell us about His purpose with mankind on this earth.¹ The Bible is recognized as providing this very communication. In it, God has revealed to us His purpose and how we can become part of it.

Why, though, doesn't God use some other method to communicate with us, especially now when so much religious confusion exists? Surely, it would be far more effective for God to send an angel to talk to us directly, or give us visions that tell us in no uncertain terms what He wants us to do and then convince us that He is God by doing amazing miracles?

Moses & Elijah

In the Old Testament of the Bible, we discover that God in the past did use this very approach! In other words, we can actually see for ourselves how well this method worked.

Moses provides one such example. Perhaps you may remember from Sunday School stories or from movies how God, through Moses, provided miracle after miracle coming out of the land of Egypt: the ten plagues in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea on dry land, bread coming down from heaven, water coming from a rock.

Now consider the end result. What happened to the generation of people who saw all the miracles performed through Moses? The book of Hebrews says:

For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? (Hebrews 3:16-18)

Every person over twenty (except two, Joshua and Caleb), who came out of Egypt and saw all the miracles, *died* in the wilderness before reaching the land promised to them.

1 The "if" part of the first sentence is addressed in another booklet, *Is there a Living God?* See inside back cover.

The next verse says, “so we see they could not enter in because of unbelief” (v.19).

Despite all the miracles, they just didn’t believe.

This same lack of belief was found in the days of Elijah. This great prophet called to the people to turn from their worship of a false god, Baal, to the worship of the true God, Yahweh.² At this time God provided an impressive miracle to confirm Elijah’s word: God caused fire to come down from heaven and consume the sacrifice *and* the altar!



Elijah and the Prophets of Baal.
Image from page 112 of “True stories for
little people..” (Richmond, E. J, 1894)

Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that [was] in the trench. (1 Kings 18:38)

Unfortunately, Elijah realizes that the people’s response was only superficial. In abject depression he cries out to God,

‘I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.’ (1 Kings 19:10)

Elijah was unaware that a few in the nation still remained faithful to the true God. Nonetheless, this miracle was unable to turn the nation back to God. Eventually, despite prophets like Elijah being sent, the northern kingdom of Israel descended into idolatry and immorality until God had had enough and sent them away into a long captivity.

An Important Lesson

Both Moses and Elijah learned an important lesson. These two men of God were both taken to the same mountain, perhaps even to same spot on that mountain, where they were each given a different type of miraculous vision.

² This account can be found in 1 Kings 18.

The lesson for Moses came just after the people had crossed the Red Sea and received bread from heaven. At that very time, the people showed a complete unwillingness to believe by making a golden calf to worship. Moses climbed the mountain and asked God to “show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18)—that is, those things which lead people to honor and esteem God. God’s answer was not to show some miraculous display of power. Instead, God revealed His name, who He is, as the power that moves people to honor Him:

And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6-7)

Here is the vital lesson God was teaching Moses: What was important to God was not the miracles, but the revelation of His goodness and faithfulness.

Elijah was taught a similar lesson. Just at the time when he was feeling depressed at the lack of belief in the nation, God told him,

“Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11-12)

Elijah was awestruck by earthquake, wind and fire, but God told him that the important thing was not the miracles; the true power would be found in the still small voice of God’s word.

What these two examples teach us is that amazing miracles and spectacular displays of power don’t necessarily convert people and give them faith in God. Even Jesus said to his disciple after his resurrection (the greatest miracle all),

*What was important to God was...**the revelation of His goodness and faithfulness.***

‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’ (John 20:29)

The apostle Paul similarly says, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Why Miracles

So, if it is true that faith comes by hearing the word of God and not by seeing some flashy miracles, why did God bother with the miracles in the first place? And, why did Jesus, the Son of God, perform so many miracles? Finally, what of his apostles who were given the gifts of the Holy Spirit specifically that they might do miraculous things?

The answer lies in understanding that, while miracles were never designed to usurp the word of God to produce faith, they did have a very important function.

When Moses was asked by God to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, he was very concerned they might not listen. Understanding this, God gave Moses

*Moses was enabled to perform miracles in order to **authenticate** his message...*

the ability to perform some miracles, like turning his rod into a snake, causing his arm to become leprous and then clean again, and turning water into blood (Exodus 4:1-9).

These abilities were given to Moses “that they (the Israelites) may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you” (Exodus 4:5). In other words, Moses was enabled to perform miracles in order to *authenticate* his message.



Possible location of Mount Sinai ~ Mount Moses in the Sinai Peninsula controlled by Egypt

And why not? Forty years earlier Moses had fled from Egypt in controversial circumstances. Why would the people listen to him now when he returned to Egypt? The miracles were there to convince the people that the words Moses spoke were God's words, and he was God's messenger.

This method was repeated when the people were taken to Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God. The giving of that law was accompanied by miraculous displays of power:

Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. (Exodus 19:18)

There wasn't a shadow of doubt that what was about to be spoken came from God. Similarly, with prophets like Elijah, we might ask the question, "Why would anyone listen to him?" Elijah was rather unique in appearance, but the fact that he could perform miracles made people sit up and take notice. Elijah was the first of the prophets sent to the northern kingdom of Israel, so his message needed the authentication that it came from God.

Jesus and His Disciples

We see the exact same need with the gifts of the Holy Spirit in New Testament times. We read in the letter to the Hebrews:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved



steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (Hebrews 2:1-4)

First, notice that this passage speaks of “the word spoken through angels.” This is meant to remind us that God spoke with Moses through ministering angels. The accompanying miracles were to confirm that God was speaking through the angel to this man of God.

Next, the passage applies this principle to Jesus and his apostles. The words spoken to them were “confirmed” by God “bearing witness” to them through “gifts of the Holy Spirit.” Just like in the days of Moses and Elijah, the words of Christ and the apostles also needed authentication that they were not their own words, but words that came from God.

It’s easy to see the reason why this authentication was so important. Jesus came at a time when the Jewish nation had lived for about 1500 years according to the Law given at Mount Sinai. What Jesus said would sound extremely radical, things like,

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” (Matthew 5:21-22)

Here Jesus quotes the law and appears to change it! Who was going to listen to him, an obscure rabbi from some town in Galilee? And so, Jesus, as we learn from reading the Gospel records, performed many miracles to attest to the fact that he was sent from God.

The Writings of the Apostles

This general principle continues with the words of the apostles and their writings. Paul wrote,

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16)



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The phrase “inspiration of God” is translated from a word that literally means “God-breathed.” In other words, the Bible is the word that comes from God’s own mouth!

Peter says, “for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). We shouldn’t read the Bible because we trust in the words of men; we should read the Bible because we believe it was inspired by the power of God.

Holy Spirit Gifts Today

With these thoughts in mind, let’s examine two things. First, we will consider modern day claims of Holy Spirit gifts. Then, we will look at how the Bible explains the purpose and function of these gifts, and, once their function was fulfilled, what became of them.

What, then, are we to make of modern-day claims from some churches that their members possess the gifts of the Holy Spirit?³ You may have heard of people speaking in tongues, faith-healings and other miraculous acts. However, what is notable about all these claims is they almost always take place in very controlled environments.

Jesus and his apostles performed their miracles out in the open, among the crowds, in busy public places. The news of their miracles traveled wide. But the same thing can’t be said of those who claim to perform miracles today. They are usually done inside their own church walls or tents, almost always accompanied by powerful music and oratory. If these miracles were genuine, wouldn’t you at least expect they would regularly reach the pages of our newspapers?

Non-Christian Parallels

When we analyze modern day claims of Holy Spirit gifts, we find that the phenomenon seen in many of these churches is very similar to things seen in non-Christian environments historically.

“Glossolalia had been practiced for many years along with other ecstatic phenomena by the prophets of the ancient religions of the Near East. Prophets and mystics of Assyria, Egypt, and Greece reportedly spoke in foreign tongues during states of ecstasy and

3 A useful summary of Holy Spirit gifts can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10: the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, the working of miracles, prophecy, ability to discern whether one professing to speak in Christ’s name was true or a liar, speaking in tongues (i.e., different languages), and the ability to interpret these tongues.



uttered unintelligible phrases said to be revelations from the gods... The practice was known in ancient India and China, and ethnographies describe glossolalia in almost every area of the world.”⁴

A modern non-Christian example can be seen in something called *shamanism*. In this practice the Shaman priest enters a state known as ecstasy. Shamans are said to be able to treat people who are sick, much like the claims of today’s faith healers. One enters this state of ecstasy through the use of drugs or, matching the techniques used in churches, through something called autosuggestion, similar to hypnosis.

We can also see parallels in the things done by a hypnotist entertaining people. These observations are important in seeking to understand modern day claims of Holy Spirit gifts.

Speaking in Tongues

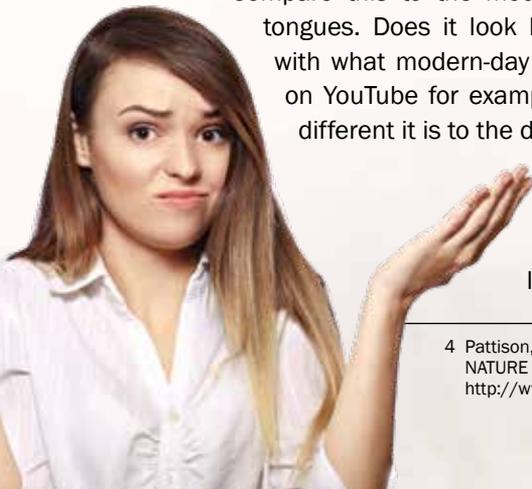
In the first century the apostles actually spoke in a way that could be understood by people who spoke a different language. Look, for example, at the list of people in Acts 2 who understood what the apostles were saying:

Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” (Acts 2:7-11)

Compare this to the modern-day phenomenon of speaking in tongues. Does it look like this? If you are not that familiar with what modern-day speaking in tongues is like, google it on YouTube for examples. You will discover just how vastly different it is to the description above.

Speaking in tongues (also called *glossolalia*) in churches today has been investigated fairly extensively by linguists and other scientists.

4 Pattison, E. “BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE RESEARCH ON THE NATURE OF GLOSSOLALIA.” Science in Christian Perspective. <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1968/JASA9-68Pattison.html>



They have concluded that this kind of speech is either the result of hypnotism, neurosis, a partial form of epilepsy or simply trickery.⁵

The End of the Law of Moses and Holy Spirit Gifts

We have already looked at what the Holy Spirit gifts were for. They were distributed to the apostles at a very important time in Jewish history. It was the time when the Jewish Law, given through angels to Moses and the people of Israel fifteen hundred years previously, was to be replaced by the things to do with Jesus of Nazareth.

What we have seen is that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were firmly connected with the end of the practices of the Law of Moses.



Interestingly, the day of Pentecost was, according to Jewish tradition, the anniversary date when Moses went up into Mount Sinai to receive the Law. So in Acts 2 when the gifts were given on this day and the apostles spoke in tongues, the Law of Moses would have been on the minds of the people. That law had been accompanied with mighty signs and wonders, but now here were new miracles and signs, and the preaching of a new covenant.

Paul describes those under the law to being like children. Children need rules and structure. That's exactly what the Law of Moses provided.

There are some other important parallels between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Law of Moses. Paul brings them out in the two letters he wrote to the church in Corinth. Christians in Corinth had bought into a wave of enthusiasm surrounding the Holy Spirit gifts. Reading through 1

Corinthians 12-14 we can see the Corinthians had become rather carried away. In fact, they were abusing the gifts to such an extent their church services had become a chaotic mess. Paul found it necessary to tell them to “let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).

⁵ For example, see the well-known scientific study by William J. Samarin, *Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1972). The book can be found on Amazon.

Before we look at what Paul says in this context, consider what he says elsewhere about the Law of Moses:

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Galatians 3:24-25)

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.” (Galatians 4:3)

Paul describes those under the law to being like children. Children need rules and structure. That’s exactly what the Law of Moses provided. Paul encourages these Christians to grow up into spiritual maturity so the law would no longer be needed.

Interestingly, Paul applies the same figure to the Holy Spirit gifts. In a passage where he is talking about how the gifts would one day cease, he says:

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (1 Corinthians 13:11)

Paul is likening the Holy Spirit gifts, just like the Law of Moses, to being something needed by children, at least spiritually speaking. He tells the Corinthians that there needs to come a time when they grow up and “put away childish things,” just as he exhorted the Galatians to grow up and put away their dependence on law.

Next Paul says:

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Paul uses another figure, that of a mirror. He says the Holy Spirit gifts are like looking in a mirror where we can see something, but not very clearly. In Paul’s day mirrors were made of steel, not glass, hence they did not provide a very good reflection. Paul looked forward to a time when things would be seen clearly—“face to face.”

Paul also talks about how the Law, and the old covenant that was connected with it, would be done away with. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he has a whole chapter in this regard, but consider in particular these verses:

But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.



*“But their minds were blinded.
For until this day the same veil
remains unlifted in the reading
of the Old Testament..”*

2 Corinthians 3:14

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:15-18)

Note the contrast with seeing into a mirror dimly. Paul uses the same figure here, but now it is the Law that gives only a veiled vision. When that veil is lifted through the things concerning Jesus Christ and the new covenant, then one can see into the mirror clearly.

Two figures, childish things and seeing into a mirror dimly, are both applied to the Law of Moses *and* the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Clearly, the Law and the gifts were lacking in what they could do, and for this reason, they were both to be withdrawn.

In that same chapter Paul says four times:

*But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was **passing away**, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is **passing away** was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.*

*Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech – unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was **passing away**. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is **taken away** in Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:7-14)*

The words in bold are each translated from a word which means to abolish or do away with. This is exactly what happened: the Law was done away with. The New Testament tells us that this was accomplished through the work of Christ.

The same word is used in 1 Corinthians 13, but here it is used to describe the cessation of the Holy Spirit gifts:

*Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will **fail**; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will **vanish away**. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when*

*that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be **done away**. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I **put away** childish things. (1 Corinthians 13:8-11)*

Paul uses the same word four times, but this time in regard to the gifts. Where it says “prophecies”, “tongues” and “knowledge,” Paul is talking about the gifts of prophecy, tongues and knowledge. He leaves us in no uncertain terms that they would cease. The question is, when?

When The Holy Spirit Gifts Ceased

We don't know precisely when the gifts were withdrawn, but an educated guess is AD 70 when the Romans came against Jerusalem. This was when the Temple was destroyed and many prophecies regarding the end of the Jewish nation came to pass. What a fitting reminder to the Jews that with the destruction of the Temple their national law truly had ceased!

Also, by this time the gospel of the new covenant in Christ had traveled throughout the Jewish world through the work of the apostles. The Holy Spirit gifts which were given to attest to the end of the Law and the beginning of the new covenant in Christ were no longer needed; they were now withdrawn.

Apostolic Hands Needed For Holy Spirit Gifts

There is also evidence that only the apostles could pass on the gifts:

*Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, **prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit**. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then **they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit**. (Acts 8:14-17)*



The gospel had recently been preached in Samaria. However, before the new believers could receive the Holy Spirit, the apostles had to be called from Jerusalem to lay hands on them. Eventually, the apostles died out, many of them by the time Jerusalem was destroyed or some time thereafter, and with them the gifts died out too.

Final Lessons From Moses and Elijah

Let's come back to the lessons learned by Moses and Elijah. The important thing Elijah learned is that miracles don't convert. What matters is the "still small voice."

The same was true with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They were given to attest to the message preached by Christ and the apostles. That message, the still small voice of the gospel, lived on and is still at the core of true Christianity.

In fact, Jesus himself said, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). It wasn't so much the Holy Spirit that was important, but what it produced: the things the apostles heard and wrote down into what we call the New Testament.

Now consider Moses: He couldn't convert the nation despite the abundance of miracles God performed through him. What God taught him was the importance of God's character, those things that move people to honor and esteem God.

This is precisely the lesson Paul draws out in 1 Corinthians 13. In the immediate context prior to that chapter, Paul says:

Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:30-31)

The Corinthians were caught up in the excitement of the gifts, but Paul points to "a more excellent way." What is this more excellent way?

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

The Holy Spirit gifts are nothing in comparison to the attribute of godly love. It's all very well to speak in tongues and perform amazing miracles, but without love it would be entirely meaningless. Love is the epitome of the character of God. In fact, in Galatians Paul calls love, along with all the other godly characteristics that make it up, "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22). The power of God's character is seen in the way true believers react to it: "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Romans 2:4).

An Appeal to the Reader

In this booklet we began by asking, "Why doesn't God talk with us today in a way that would really convince us?" It seemed so reasonable to suppose that if God really wanted to communicate with us, He would use a more dramatic or powerful method. The word of God in written form just didn't seem sufficient to produce real faith and belief.

What we have learned instead is that really dramatic displays of God's power don't actually generate the kind of faith God desires. The nation that witnessed miracle after miracle from Egypt through their wilderness travels died in the wilderness from their inability to truly believe and trust God. The nation that experienced the incredible miracles performed by Jesus Christ was the same nation that later turned and crucified him. Finally, in the Christian era, it was not the miracles, but the word of God through the preaching of Jesus' disciples that turned the world upside down.

This same word has the same power today to change us—if we are willing to read it and listen to it. The "still small voice" of God still has the power to generate in us a real belief and trust in Him. This is why the apostle Paul tells us that "faith comes by *hearing*, and hearing by the *word of God*" (Romans 10:17).

What this means is that faith will grow and develop in us when we read, understand and then believe God's written word. This, in turn, will powerfully influence our thinking and change our way of living. This is true power!

My appeal is simple: Give regular reading of God's word a try. Seek to understand what you are reading. Learn who the real living God⁶ is and the hope that He promises. If you do this, your life will never be the same.

~ Richard Morgan

⁶ If you would like to read more about who the real living God is, consider another booklet in this series: "*Is there really a living God? Why it makes sense to believe*"



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WHY DOESN'T GOD TALK WITH US TODAY?

Why doesn't God speak to us today as He once did to the Jewish people?

Ancient Israel heard God's actual voice and saw manifestations of His great power. Wouldn't this convince people today who have turned the silence of God into a reason to deny His existence? Wouldn't this clear away the confusion of the multiple voices all claiming to speak on God's behalf? One voice, one message!

It is obvious God has *not* chosen this way to communicate with us. What is not obvious is why. In this booklet, the reader is invited to

- Discover why God doesn't operate this way.
- Learn a vital lesson God taught both Moses and the prophet Elijah who wanted God to speak to the people by showing His great power.
- Find out about the real purpose for miracles, including the miraculous gifts given to Jesus' disciples in the first century.
- Uncover the truth about what the gifts of the Holy Spirit could and could *not* do.
- Discover what really has the power to change us and develop in us the faith God desires.