

A NOTE ON MARK 16:12 -

In verse 12, Jesus "appeared in a different form" (ἐν ἑτέρῳ μορφῇ). The word "form" here is μορφή (morphē), which is the standard Greek word for form, though it appears only three times in the New Testament, in two contexts. The key to understanding this passage comes from Luke 24:16, which explains that the eyes of the two disciples were "holden" (prohibited) from recognizing His identity. Later, in verse 31, their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, though He then vanished from their sight.

It's important to note that Jesus was not actually in a different form, but rather, as the text precisely states, He "appeared in another form." The distinction is that His appearance (φαίνω, phaino) was different, not His actual form. The Greek word for appearance relates to how light reflects off an object to create its visible manifestation.

VERSE 16 (ALSO IN SESSION 67)

The Lord now gives commentary on people, not creation. The words "every creature" are in the feminine gender, while "He that believeth" is in the masculine. The Lord tells the apostles that whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.

First, we should note the future tense of this salvation, consistent with a kingdom message of a future messianic salvation and restitution of all things. In the Pauline gospel (that is, in the dispensation of the grace of God), Paul consistently uses the present tense, such as in Ephesians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Timothy 1:9, and Titus 3:5.

Second, it is noteworthy that Jesus explicitly linked baptism with belief as the means of future salvation, while Paul explicitly linked grace through faith alone as the means for a present possession of salvation.

I do not think "and be baptized" can be dismissed as a supplemental, optional follow-up to belief. The clarity of the words is too strong, and baptism carries as much weight as belief in the passage. Further, Peter, preaching the Lord's Kingdom Gospel, also included baptism in Acts 2:38. It is also explicitly mentioned in Matthew 28:19.

Those who *rightly divide the word of truth* (2 Tim. 2:15) are accustomed to separating the Kingdom Gospel from the Gospel of grace, but most of Christendom is somewhat allergic to this idea, and therefore must either take baptism as a requirement or be dismissive of the words.

I would be remiss not to note that evangelicalism works very hard to argue that there is no requirement for baptism in this verse. They need to make this argument because they have not recognized the dispensational change that came about with Paul (this will be the same in the miraculous signs in verses 17-18). Here is one example from the website *GotQuestions*:

Assuming that verse 16 is original to Mark, does it teach that baptism is required for salvation? The short answer is, no, it does not. In order to make it teach that baptism is required for salvation, one must go beyond what the verse actually says. What this verse does teach is that belief is necessary for salvation, which is consistent with the countless verses where ONLY belief is mentioned...

While this verse tells us something about believers who have been baptized (they are saved), it does not say anything about believers who have NOT been baptized. In order for this verse to teach that baptism is necessary for salvation, a third statement would be necessary, viz., "He who believes and is not baptized will be condemned" or "He who is not baptized will be condemned." But, of course, neither of these statements is found in the verse...

Consider this example: "Whoever believes and lives in Kansas will be saved, but those that do not believe are condemned." This statement is strictly true; Kansans who believe in Jesus will be saved. However, to say that *ONLY* those believers who live in Kansas are saved is an illogical and false assumption.¹

This argument commits the fallacy of **affirming the negative as proof**—claiming that because Mark 16:16 doesn't say "he that is not baptized shall be damned," baptism must not matter.

But consider this:

"He that eats and digests shall live; but he that eats not shall die."

We don't need to say "*and digests not*" in the second clause, because digestion is irrelevant if one doesn't eat. Yet digestion is clearly necessary in the first clause. The omission in the second doesn't negate its role—it just becomes moot without the first condition.

Likewise, in Mark 16:16:

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

- Baptism, like digestion, is meaningless without belief.
- The second clause doesn't nullify the first; it simply identifies the sufficient cause for condemnation.

Grammatically, the verse joins two actions—*believeth* and *is baptized*—to one result: *shall be saved*. There's no indication either is optional. The argument from omission is both logically weak and grammatically flawed.

Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38 do, in their context, require baptism for salvation. But they were spoken:

- Before the revelation of the mystery (Eph. 3:1–9),
- While the kingdom was still being offered to Israel (Mark 1:4; Luke 7:29–30),
- And before Paul's gospel of grace apart from works (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9) was revealed.

Paul later minimizes baptism (1 Cor. 1:17), emphasizing instead a dispensation in which salvation is by grace through faith alone.

So baptism was essential then—not grammatically optional—but is not required now because **we are no longer in that dispensation**. That's rightly dividing, not rewriting.

MARK 16:17-18 | THE SIGNS

VERSES 17-18 -

In the concluding verses of Mark's Gospel, the Lord gives a series of signs that are to follow "them that believe"—with no stated qualifications limiting these signs to a select group of believers (Mark 16:17–18). The promised signs include casting out devils, speaking with new tongues, taking up serpents, drinking deadly substances without harm, and healing the sick by the laying on of hands.

¹ Got Questions Ministries. "Does Mark 16:16 Teach That Baptism Is Necessary for Salvation?" [GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/baptism-Mark-16-16.html), <https://www.gotquestions.org/baptism-Mark-16-16.html>. Accessed 9 Apr. 2025.

In the book of Acts, we find recorded instances of all these signs—*except* for drinking poison. Yet even that exception does not create a theological problem, because Acts is not an exhaustive record of early church events. Luke himself explicitly states that he is writing “in order” (Luke 1:1–3) and only documenting what Jesus “began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1), strongly implying continuation and selectivity. Throughout the narrative, there are several places where long spans of time are condensed with general statements:

- “*And with many other words did he testify and exhort...*” (Acts 2:40)
- “*By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought...*” (Acts 5:12–16)
- “*Then had the churches rest... and were edified... and were multiplied*” (Acts 9:31)
- “*So that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord...*” (Acts 19:10)
- “*Ye know... after what manner I have been with you at all seasons...*” (Acts 20:18)

All of this took place over an approximate 30 year time-frame (AD 33-63).

Additionally, Paul’s own testimony in his letters confirms that much of his ministry is missing from the Acts account. In 2 Corinthians 11:23–25, he refers to multiple beatings and imprisonments not recorded in Acts, including being whipped five times, beaten with rods three times, and shipwrecked—none of which are fully documented. Finally, the book of Acts ends abruptly, with Paul under house arrest and no resolution to his legal case (Acts 28:31), reinforcing that we are reading a selective account, not a full chronicle.

Given the clear evidence of the promised signs occurring—exorcisms, tongues, miraculous healings, and serpent encounters (e.g., Acts 28:3–5)—we can reasonably conclude that Jesus presented these signs as normative for believers within the timeframe of Acts. They were not special exceptions; they were expected in the newly forming believing community.

The modern reader, however, must ask a legitimate question: *Why don’t these signs occur today?*

Noticing that these signs had never been characteristic of believers *prior* to this point in Scripture, one might naturally conclude that a *new dispensation* was being inaugurated. That timeframe is clearly documented in the book of Acts, as God begins to work in a new way among those who believe.

But since these signs are no longer operative today, we must also conclude that something has again changed. That leads us to examine Scripture for a later dispensational shift. Paul’s words in Ephesians 3:1–2 describe a “dispensation of the grace of God” given specifically to him for the Gentiles—something he also calls a mystery hidden in times past but now revealed. This suggests that the signs of Mark 16 were consistent with the earlier dispensation recorded in Acts, but are not part of the current dispensation in which we live.

What does remain today, according to Paul, are faith, hope, and charity (1 Corinthians 13:13). These are not sensational signs, but they are enduring marks of God’s present work. Paul’s clear statement that these three “abide” or “remain” provides a definitive contrast to the earlier sign-gifts, which he says will cease (1 Corinthians 13:8).

In short, we are not in the Mark 16 pattern anymore, and we should not pretend otherwise. The signs promised to believers were real, operative, and purposeful in their time. But we are not in that time. We are in the dispensation of grace, where the mystery revealed to Paul governs the believer’s experience—not miraculous signs, but the abiding trio of faith, hope, and charity.

VERSE 19 -

This ascension took place near Jerusalem (Luke 24:50–51), while the so-called “Great Commission” likely took place on a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:7, 10, 16). Matthew does not include the ascension, as do Mark and Luke, as well as Acts, so it is easy to confuse and conflate the location of the commission to the apostles with the ascension.

The passive phrase, “he was received up” followed by the active “and sat on the right hand of God” echoes Psalm 110:1, “Sit thou at my right hand, Until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” You and I live in the “until” segment of this Psalm.

VERSE 20 -

The followers of Jesus went “every where,” being obedient to the instructions of the Lord. Furthermore, as we suspected would happen from verses 17-18, the promised signs were present.

We are told that "the Lord" was "working with THEM." The Lord did not ascend to sit idle at God's right hand. Rather, He was working in the apostolic era from heaven, doing the heavenly side of the work while the believers did the earthly side. Consider Ephesians 4:11: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Also Hebrews 7:25: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Furthermore, we see specific examples of the Lord Himself working in these passages:

Event	Reference	Nature	Purpose
Saul on Damascus Road	Acts 9	Visible, audible, glorious	Call to apostleship of grace
Stephen’s vision	Acts 7	Vision of Christ standing	Warning to Israel
Ananias’ vision	Acts 9	Vision	Instruction for transition
Paul in temple	Acts 22	Vision	Direction
Paul in prison	Acts 23	Encouragement	Assurance