


# Rethinking a fundamentalist literalist reading of Mark 16:18 by some new prophetic churches

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Some of the New Prophetic Churches apply the fundamentalist literalist reading of the biblical text in their sermons and theology because of a lack of knowledge and application of proper reading and interpretation of scripture. The fundamentalist literalist reading of scripture particularly Mark 16:18 is linked here to the abuses by some of the pastors in New Prophetic Churches. In addressing these challenges, this article proposes a proper exegetical study of Mark 16:18 that pays attention to the context of the text, the historical background and the grammar of the text. This will be achieved by giving a background to a fundamentalist literalist reading of scripture in Pentecostalism particularly as practised by New Prophetic Churches in South Africa. The article will also highlight some of the challenges posed by the fundamentalist literalist reading of scripture. The final section is an exegetical study of Mark 16:18, which is interpreted by recognising the whole passage of Mark 16:9–20 even though some New Testament scholars do not recognise this longer ending. This article reflected on this passage in response to the fundamentalist literalist reading among New Prophetic Churches not necessarily to enter the debate between the short ending and longer ending.

**Contribution:** This article challenges fundamentalist literalist reading of scripture in New Prophetic Churches. The article proposes a thorough exegetical reading of Mark 16:18 that recognises the exegetical tools such as history, grammar and the context of the text.

**Keywords:** fundamentalist literalist reading; New Prophetic Churches; exegesis; Pentecostalism; proof-texting; Mark 16:18.

## Introduction

There are two main approaches to the reading of the Bible among Pentecostals, that is, the fundamentalist literalist reading and the hermeneutics of experience. The latter is based on the Pentecostals' emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the biblical text. Most importantly, the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism is the one that gives the believer insight and a deeper understanding of the biblical texts (Nel 2021:3). Pentecostals believe that when they read the bible, the Holy Spirit is involved. They do not only understand the bible from a factual basis but also through the work of the Holy Spirit. Nel (2023:182) points out that 'the dynamic nature of their bible reading practices tends to find meaning and value in the biblical text through the Spirit's work rather than based on what happened'. Therefore, given its pneumatological basis and foundation, scripture in the Pentecostal movement is not only approached from its scientific rigour but also as the Spirit-inspired word of God. The fundamentalist literalist reading of the biblical text is mainly informed by the love and respect that the Pentecostals have for the Bible (Archer 2004; eds. Machingura & Togarasei 2018; ed. Martin 2013). Some Pentecostals perceive the Bible as the word of God (Nel 2015, 2017). In addition, Pentecostals believe that the Bible is inerrant, hence they do not see the need to criticise the biblical text. Most classical Pentecostal churches have made confessions and pronouncements acknowledging the Bible as the word of God. This rationale shall be explained further in the 'Fundamentalist literalist reading of the biblical text in Pentecostalism' section.

While the fundamentalist literalist reading of the biblical text informs Pentecostal hermeneutics of many Pentecostals, the challenge is that in some instances it is linked with some of the abuses of religion. The literature review in this article demonstrates that the Fundamentalist literalist reading of scripture breeds some abuses in New Prophetic Churches as scripture is interpreted without taking into cognizance the context of the text and the context of the reader and other important factors such as historical background and grammar. The contribution of this article is

the exegetical approach that incorporates the important exegetical tools in the reading and interpretation of Mark 16:18. Therefore, the main structure of the article will include the fundamentalist literalist reading in Pentecostalism, the fundamentalist literalist reading of Mark 16:18 in New Prophetic Churches and the challenges posed by the fundamentalist literalist reading. The last section is an exegesis of Mark 16:18, which is different from the fundamentalist literalist reading as it considers the broader passage of Mark 16:9–20. In the 'Fundamentalist literalist reading of the biblical text in Pentecostalism' section, a background is given to the literalist reading of the biblical text in the Pentecostal tradition.

## Fundamentalist literalist reading of the biblical text in Pentecostalism

The Pentecostal movement has been engaged in the fundamentalist literalist reading of the biblical text as informed by their love and respect for the Bible. This is the approach that Pentecostals take when engaging with the bible (Purdy 2015:115). Fundamentalist Literalist reading and interpretation of the biblical text is the approach to the text that takes each word of the text in the literal sense. This kind of hermeneutics enlarges the gap between the context of the bible and the context of the real reader in the 21st century (ed. Martin 2013:3). This approach is supported among Pentecostals because of their standing on the Bible as the word of God, hence they end up accepting the biblical text without further engagement or criticism (ed. Lysik 2001:158). Therefore, most Pentecostals around the world perceive the biblical text as authoritative, which is a rationale for its reading without taking into cognizance its historical and grammatical aspects (Archer 2004:17). The fundamentalist literalist approach, according to Lysisk (2–1:159) 'also places undue stress upon the inerrancy of certain details in the biblical texts, especially in what concerns historical events or supposedly scientific truth'. The fundamentalist literalist reading of the biblical text has the potential to result in the unscientific approach to the Bible as a result of perceiving the latter as the 'word of God', 'inerrancy of scripture' and 'the authoritative role of scripture'. The same also has the potential for an outsider to perceive Pentecostals as anti-intellectuals given their non-scientific approach to the biblical text. This calls for the reflection on the Pentecostal stance of perceiving the biblical text as the word of God or even as inerrant but to engage the biblical text in a critical and robust manner. The reading and interpretation of the biblical text cannot ignore the important approaches to the Bible such as its history and the language.

Literalist reading of the biblical text is closely related to what scholars call 'proof texting' which is the selection of scriptures to achieve a certain agenda. Kaunda (2020:76) points out that the Pentecostals use 'two aspects of Pentecostal hermeneutics namely the fundamentalist literalist reading of the Bible and proof-texting of the same'. Proof-texting is related to fundamentalist literalist interpretation because in it the reader uses the text to authenticate their doctrine or practices

(Gabaitse 2015:3). In other words, some Pentecostals would look for the biblical texts that suit them (proof-texting) and apply them in the fundamentalist literalist sense to justify their practices. Therefore, it can be stated categorically that this kind of approach to hermeneutics is used by some Pentecostals in a way of using biblical texts to align with the Pentecostal experiences in different contexts (eds. Wilkinson & Studebaker 2010:194). This approach has been used by Pentecostals even in the early stages of the movement by intentionally selecting the biblical texts that gave reference to the work of the Holy Spirit (Courey 2015:88). Therefore, since its inception, the Pentecostal movement has been zealous to believe in biblical texts and apply them without scientific rigour, particularly in support of the work of the Holy Spirit. The use of proof-texting is also abusive in the sense that the biblical text can be manipulated to suit the preacher to the detriment of the members or followers (Fasol 2019). Similarly, prosperity gospel ministers would manipulate the biblical texts to motivate their congregants to give money to them. Therefore, proof-texting is basically the picking of a few biblical texts to use as a manipulative mechanism in order to achieve the preacher's agenda including the pursuit of materialism.

There is also a connection between fundamentalist literalist interpretation and Christian fundamentalism in the Pentecostal tradition. Christian fundamentalism refers to the movement among protestants who interpret or support the interpretation of biblical texts in the literalist sense. The fundamentalists are therefore known for fighting any other movement or scholarship that challenges the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of scripture. Sutton (2020:54) explains that 'Christian fundamentalism has been associated with the beliefs of conservative protestant Christians who reacted against religious scholars who challenged the traditional methods of understanding scripture'. Therefore, Christian fundamentalism can be defined as the movement that rose to counter anything that challenged the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of scripture such as modernity, science, academic scholarship and so forth (Mirola, Emerson & Monahan 2022). Jordan (2004) explains that:

Pentecostalism is intimately wedded to Christian Fundamentalism, requiring a literalist interpretation of the Bible and the spurning of the religious significance of myth, thus stilling the intellect and the imagination. (p. 154)

This means that the Pentecostal tradition as one of the proponents of the fundamentalist literalist interpretation became part of Christian fundamentalism. Anderson (2013:37) concurs, 'The first Pentecostals always appealed to the Bible and their literalist and pragmatic interpretation of it to justify their sometimes-controversial practices. These justifications were often couched in fundamentalist language'.

As pointed out in the introduction, there is a rationale for the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of the biblical texts in the Pentecostal movement. One of the reasons is that Pentecostals perceive the bible as a very authoritative text, which should be believed and taken seriously without

questioning its authority (Steward 2012:27). This means that the biblical text and its content are taken in the literalist sense without checking the original meaning and interrogating some of the questions that might arise in the text because it is authoritative. The second reason is that Pentecostals have a genuine love for the bible to the extent that questioning it seems to temper with such love (eds. Okafor & Chukwu 2004:136). Thirdly, Pentecostals also believe that the Holy Spirit speaks to them through the very same bible, hence every text is taken in the literalist sense (eds. Okafor & Chukwu 2004:136). Purdy (2015) explains that the:

Pentecostal view of scripture is that the ultimate author is the Holy Spirit. This being the case, approaching Scripture to hear its message should be done prayerfully and with an expectation that the Holy Spirit will aid in the process of understanding. (p. 127)

As discussed in the 'Introduction', the connection between the Holy and the biblical interpretation is very strong in Pentecostalism. Therefore, it is believed that every text in the bible has received the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to empower the believer to be able to deal with life situations. It is the connection between the bible and the Holy Spirit that makes Pentecostals perceive the biblical text as inerrant. Similarly, some Pentecostals do not see the need to question the biblical text given the connection. In the 'Fundamentalist literalist interpretation of Mark 16:18 in New Prophetic Churches' section, the article examines how some New Prophetic Churches interpret Mark 16:18 in a fundamentalist literalist manner.

## Fundamentalist literalist interpretation of Mark 16:18 in New Prophetic Churches

New Prophetic Churches are neo-Pentecostal churches that emphasise the prophetic gift, prophetic titles, prophetic miracles, prophetic deliverance and prophetic products in their theology and practice (Kgatle 2021). One such church is Rabboni Centre Ministries of Pastor Lesego Daniel with its headquarters in the north of Pretoria, Soshanguve (eds. Kgatle & Anderson 2020:6). Pastor Daniel also known as 'petrol pastor' quoted Mark 16:18, which says in the King James Version that 'They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover'. Daniel used this text to encourage the members of his church to drink petrol because according to him it will not harm them (Qiki 2020). He stated to his congregants that once he has prayed for the petrol, it changes to become juice. Banda (2021a:4) explains that one of the reasons, Daniel managed to convince his members and followers to drink petrol is that he promised that it will turn into pineapple juice once he had prayed for it. Therefore, a dangerous substance such as 'petrol' according to Daniel cannot harm a believer as promised in Mark 16:18 but rather the believer has the authority to change the substance. Daniel performed other miracles through the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of Mark 16:18 such as feeding his congregants with grass. Furthermore, snakes and

other dangerous animals appear in the church of Daniel in the demonstration that the children of God do have the authority to 'take up snakes' and to drink 'any deadly thing'.

The other church is End Time Disciples Ministries of prophet Penuel Mnguni also known as the 'snake pastor'. Pastor Mnguni who is also the spiritual son of Pastor Lesego Daniel led the members of his church to take up live snakes because they will not hurt them as stated in Mark 16:18 (Mofokeng 2020). Therefore, the congregants ate up snakes in End Time Disciples Ministries with the hope that these would not hurt or harm them (Khanyile 2016). The pastor aimed to show the world that according to Mark 16:18, believers have authority over snakes. Other than the snakes, Mnguni also performed other dangerous miracles such as walking on the bodies of his congregants to demonstrate that nothing can harm the believers (Resane 2017). Mnguni asked his congregants to lie down during the church service and he started to walk on top of their bodies to demonstrate that nothing can hurt the believers. There is a link between the performance of these miracles and the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of Mark 16:18 and other biblical texts, which poses a danger to the believers and followers of Mnguni.

The third church is Mount Zion General Assembly of Pastor Lethebo Rabalago also known as the 'prophet of doom' (Qiki 2020). Pastor Rabalago who was also motivated by Mark 16:18 took the insecticide called 'doom' to spray over the congregants (Shilubane 2019). Doom in a South African context is a very well-known insecticide that is very poisonous and known for the killing of cockroaches and other crawling and flying insects. The product should be placed out of reach of children and even adults are warned to use it cautiously as it can cause harm. However, according to Banda (2020c:4), pastor Rabalago sprayed it in the church in the face of the congregant in the name of healing her. Rabalago went further to state that when these substances are prayed for, they no longer become harmful but rather they can be used in the healing of the sick (Nel 2018). Again, using the last part of Mark 16:18, the believers more so the pastor or prophet have the authority to heal the sick through the use of dangerous insecticide. According to Henrico (2019:4), the National Prosecuting Authority in South Africa found Rabalago guilty of using dangerous substances on the believers. However, the challenge of using the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of scripture remains even if Pastors such as Rabalago are arrested by authorities.

The last church is the Grace Living Hope Ministries of Pastor Light Monyeki also known as the 'rat pastor'. Pastor Monyeki also used the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of Mark 16:18 when he told his congregants to drink water that was mixed up with the rattex (Dube 2020). Rattex is a poisonous substance that is used for the killing of rats. It is believed that once the rats eat the food that is mixed with the substance, they will die in a few minutes. Pastor Monyeki gathered his congregants and followers and mixed up water with the



rattex substance to give to them in the demonstration that they will not be harmed by any deadly thing (Qiki 2020). Therefore, the congregants were encouraged to drink the substance to demonstrate their faith in proving that nothing could harm them. Instead of killing them, Monyeki told the congregants that the substance will heal them and nourish their bodies. Hannah (2017) says that:

Pastor Light Monyeki told worshipers at the Grace Living Hope Ministries to drink from a bottle of water laced with noxious rattex to 'nourish their bodies' and 'heal their sickness'. (p. 1)

And because the pastor was the first one to take up the drink, the congregants followed with the same faith that the dangerous substance will not kill them because it was promised so in Mark 16:18. Hannah (2017:1) continues to say that 'After the pastor took a sip from the bottom, a multitude of congregants voluntarily ran to the front to have a drink of the deadly poison'. Therefore, it is seen here that whatever the pastor does in faith and the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of the bible, the congregants easily follow and perform the same. The 'Fundamentalist literalist interpretation: Controversial miracles, dangerous practices and the public square' section links the fundamentalist literalist reading of Mark 16:18 with other controversial miracles and dangerous practices in the public square.

## Fundamentalist literalist interpretation: Controversial miracles, dangerous practices and the public square

As discussed in the 'Fundamentalist literalist interpretation of Mark 16:18 in New Prophetic Churches' section, there seems to be a connection between the abuse of religion in the performance of controversial miracles and the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of the biblical text. Therefore, this approach is a source for some neo-Pentecostals to perform questionable miracles by using biblical text. And where there is serious biblical scholarship such as in classical Pentecostalism such bizarre miracles do not take place. Fundamentalist Literalist interpretation is the source for the neo-Pentecostal pastor or prophet to encourage his followers to take up snakes because the bible said so without checking the original and intended meaning of the same (ed. Hill 2006:212). In other words, even if they know that it is wrong to feed live snakes to congregants or spray doom on them, the prophets in these churches find a way to justify their actions through a fundamentalist literalist interpretation of text such as Mark 16:18 (Qiki & Howes 2021:4). In one way or another the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of scripture becomes a motivation for the prophet to perform the controversial miracles and for the followers to accept them as real. When the followers see that the same has been described in the bible, they are manipulated to think that the miracles are authentic. It is for this reason that prophets such as Lesego Daniel, Penuel Mnguni, Lethebo Rabalago and Light Monyeki use the bible in the performance of controversial miracles.

Fundamentalist Literalist interpretation is exposing the same believers to dangerous practices as the words in the bible are taken in the literalist sense without questioning them or even looking at their original intentions. This means that a neo-Pentecostal pastor is willing to risk his life and that of the followers by taking up snakes that might be dangerous to them. The live snake, the doom, the petrol and the rattex are all dangerous to the life and the health of the believer or followers in these churches. Therefore, in the use of fundamentalist literalist interpretation, there is a clear exposure to dangerous practices when the text is taken in the literalist sense without questioning it or considering its grammatical aspects. Pastors such as Daniel Lesego, Penuel Mnguni, Lethebo Rabalago and Pastor Light Monyeki might end up throwing themselves to lions in the faith that the lions will not eat them as they did not eat Daniel. This makes a fundamentalist literalist interpretation of scripture a very dangerous terrain. When pastors and prophets expose themselves to such danger, it is fine, but according to Thinane (2020:10), it is a serious human rights violation for pastors and prophets to expose their members and followers to such dangerous and poisonous substances.

The fundamentalist literalist interpretation reproduces controversial practices among Pentecostal believers and followers. There is a risk of believers and followers of these churches taking the other biblical texts in the literalist sense and applying them in their lives. This is because, in neo-Pentecostalism, there is much dependence on what the Pentecostal pastor does or teaches, hence the congregants or followers are more likely to take anything from them (Banda 2018, 2020a, 2020b). This is because the pastor in neo-Pentecostalism is seen as the 'man of God' or the 'woman of God' who does not have to be questioned even when it is obvious that whatever they are doing is theologically, doctrinally, ethically or humanly wrong (Biri 2020:111). The congregants and followers of these churches perceive their pastors and prophets as anointed men and women of God who speak on behalf of God (Banda 2019b). The authority of the 'man of God' or 'woman of God' is important in neo-Pentecostal spirituality and practices (Resane 2021). Therefore, whatever they utter on the pulpit is perceived as divine even if it's the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of scripture that leads to controversial miracles. In the end, the neo-Pentecostal pastors and leaders take advantage to manipulate their followers to engage in controversial miracles more so when they use the bible to validate such miracles. The vulnerable and unsuspecting congregants end up participating in these controversial miracles without questioning them.

Fundamentalist Literalist interpretation poses a threat to the image and reputation of the Pentecostal tradition when the controversial miracles by the prophets such as Daniel Lesego, Penuel Mnguni, Lethebo Rabalago and Light Monyeki are in the public square. The controversial miracles performed by these pastors have been on both social and mass media platforms (Khanyile 2016; cf. Banda 2021b). This means that most people were able to access the controversial miracles through these platforms. In addition, there have been various

inquiries such as the one led by the Commission for Religious and Linguistic Communities also known as the CRL Commission (Banda 2019a; Dube 2019). Furthermore, there has been a special television show, called *Amabishop*, which was started to probe the dangerous practices and controversial miracles by the prophets and pastors in New Prophetic Churches. These and other inquiries have made the controversial practices gain much attention in society in South Africa and the world. Society is not able to isolate these incidences from the rest of the Pentecostal churches but rather applies a blanket approach when it comes to negative perceptions towards the movement. This in a way works against the public image of the movement particularly when people cannot tell which Pentecostal sub-tradition is in the wrong. Consequently, all Pentecostal churches end up being painted with the same brush and perceived negatively. This calls for a different approach when it comes to the interpretation of the bible. It means that the Pentecostal tradition must reconsider this kind of interpretation.

## Rethinking a fundamentalist literalist reading of Mark 16:18: An exegetical approach

In rethinking a fundamentalist literalist reading of Mark 16:18, the text should be read within the broader context of the passage of Mark 16:9–20:

‘Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.’ (KJV)

Although this longer ending of Mark is not supported by some New Testament scholars, still this does warrant the selective reading of Mark 16:18 as this verse, which appears in most English versions should be understood within the broader context. Then it can be discovered that the main message of this text is the great commission as it appears also in Matthew 28:18–20. Therefore, we cannot rush to point out the signs of those who believe without pointing to the commissioning of the disciples to preach the gospel in Mark 16:9–20.

The passage starts by demonstrating the power of God by reminding the reader about Jesus who appeared to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection (Thomas & Alexander 2003). The reader is also reminded that this Magdalene was the one whom Jesus cast out demons and healed from the possession of seven demons (Begel 2012). The same Mary Magdalene shares about the resurrected Lord with other disciples of Jesus Christ so they can also believe in the resurrected Lord (Mark 16:9–11; cf. O’Collins & Kendall 1987). Mark 16:12–13 is about the appearance of Jesus to two unknown disciples with whom Jesus is very unhappy because of their unbelief. Contrary to their unbelief, Jesus commands them to proclaim the gospel to non-believers. It can therefore be deduced as per Mark 16:14–17 that there is a strong emphasis on the distinction between belief and non-belief in the passage. There are two references to believing (verses 16 and 17) and four references to not believing (verses 11, 13, 14 and 16). Hence, Jesus is very quick to rebuke the disciples for not believing when they heard the reports about his resurrection. There are also promises given to those who not only believe in receiving eternal life but also the promise of unbelief to receive eternal condemnation. The verses following 16 are also about the signs of those who believe to convince those who do not believe so they can move towards believing. Therefore, Mark 16:18 should not be taken in the literalist sense but rather as an effort to persuade the non-believers towards believing as they hear or read more about the signs of those who believe. This is very much important for the author because the gospel is achieved through faith in God not by human means and efforts. This is also understood in the broader context of the main message in the gospel of Mark.

Mark 16:17–18 which is about the signs of those who believe should also be understood in the context of the great commission. These are not signs of gimmicks as some churches want to portray them but rather the signs that demonstrate the conquest of believers against cunning spirits or evil spirits. Therefore, the use of the word ‘ὄφις’, which is translated as ‘serpent’ should be interpreted as cunning ways of evil spirits that are overcome through the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It is therefore important to have a broader understanding of this word as used in Mark 16:18 and elsewhere in the biblical texts. This also calls for the reading of Mark 16:18 with other biblical texts rather than reading it as part of proof texting. Therefore, when read with other texts such as Matthew 7:10; Luke 10:19; Luke 11:11; John 3:14; 1 Corinthians 10:9 and Revelation 9:19, it can be understood that the use of the word ‘ὄφις’ refers to cunning ways than the serpent in the literal sense. Moreover, the deception of the serpent calls for the reader of Mark 16:18 to overcome the deceptive ways of the forces of darkness. Similarly, the reader cannot take the ‘drinking of anything deadly thing’ in the literal sense but as the demonstration of the victory of Christ over the works of the devil including sickness and diseases. The believers are also promised to lay hands upon the sick to receive their healing. In Mark 16:19–20, we learn that as much as the passage began with the message of the resurrection of Jesus, it ended with the message of his ascension. The disciples should therefore preach the gospel indicating the power of his

resurrection and his ascension as well. Therefore, Mark 16:18 requires proper interpretation using various exegetical tools such as context, grammar and historical background rather than reading it in the literal sense. This is important in dealing with the manipulation of the text to feed believers with snakes, grass, petrol and other dangerous substances.

## The main message of Mark 16:9–20

From the exegetical study of the text aforementioned, it can be deduced that the main message of Mark 16:9–20 is not only about the signs of those who will believe in Christ. The main message can be summarised in three points. Firstly, it is a narration about the post events following the resurrection of Jesus Christ who first appeared to Mary Magdalene. This woman believed in Christ because of the miraculous experiences she had after the casting of seven demons out of her life. Secondly, this text is about the ascension of Jesus Christ after appearing to Mary Magdalene and the rest of the disciples whom Christ rebuked for lack of belief. In persuading them to believe the author is focussed on showing the reader that there are promises or rather signs reserved for those who believe including the speaking of tongues, divine healing and the authority of the believer. However, these signs are not the focus of the author but rather a means to transition from the state of unbelief towards belief. Lastly, the crux of Mark 16:9–20 like Mathew 28:18–20 is the commissioning of the disciples after the ascension of Jesus Christ in preaching the gospel to the different parts of the world. However, because some disciples might have been concerned about the rule of Satan in the world, it was important for Jesus to assure them of the authority they have over the works of Satan through the metaphor of the serpent and other deadly poisons. The author is not necessarily asking readers to pick up serpents and to drink deadly poison in the literal sense. It would therefore be very erroneous and heretical for any pastor or preacher to encourage their congregants to pick serpents and to drink deadly poison using Mark 16:18 as the latter is not its message.

## Conclusion

The Pentecostal movement prides itself on the involvement of the Holy Spirit when reading, interpreting and applying scripture. This position has produced two Pentecostal hermeneutical approaches in the Pentecostal movement, that is, the fundamentalist literalist approach and the hermeneutics of experience. This article problematised the fundamentalist literalist interpretation of scripture in New Prophetic Churches by highlighting some of the abuses that have links with this kind of interpretation. Therefore, as much as Pentecostals are firm in the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of scripture, this should not come at the expense of scientific reading of scripture. For this reason, scripture should be read and interpreted by involving the Holy Spirit in exegetical tools such as history, grammar and context. This means that even when claiming to have heard from God in reading a certain biblical text, there should be a scientific justification for the hermeneutical implications of

specific biblical texts. In simple terms, hearing from the Holy Spirit should not be an excuse to ignore the scientific rigour of biblical interpretation. The scientific reading of Mark 16:18 revealed that the text should be understood in the broader context of Mark 16:9–20. This passage is not only about the signs of the believers but its main message is faith in the resurrected Christ, ascension of Christ and the great commission. This should be the main focus of the reader reading the text in Mark 16:9–20 to avoid the picking of specific texts such as Mark 16:18 to manipulate and abuse believers in the 21st century. This challenges the Pentecostal hermeneutical approaches to the Bible, we should not only approach the Bible using the fundamentalist literalist reading and the hermeneutics of experience but also use the exegetical tools. Future studies can look at how scientific approaches can be juxtaposed with the Pentecostal hermeneutical approaches to avoid abuses and manipulations of biblical texts.

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## Author's contributions

M.S.K. contributed to the conceptualisation, formal analysis and writing of the article.

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