

Tongues and the Gift of Tongues

The doctrine of “speaking with tongues” is a subject in which people, both familiar and unfamiliar with tongues, have many questions. There is a predominant misunderstanding concerning tongues, namely, that tongues were for the purpose of enabling someone to miraculously preach in a language they did not know. This myth is clearly contradictory to scripture and will be shown as such.

The Bible tells us that everyone is given a measure of faith. Then we find that some, but not all, are given a gift of the Spirit known as the “gift of faith.” Similarly, there are two different operations of tongues spoken of in the Bible: (1) the tongues spoken in when an individual received the baptism of the Holy Ghost and (2) the gift of the Spirit known as the “gift of tongues.” As we look at the differences between the two, I believe you will see that this is the case.

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost

Just before Jesus ascended, He commanded his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and, “wait for the promise of the Father... For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” (Acts 1:4-5) One hundred and twenty obeyed and after a week of prayer in an “upper room,” the promise came. “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. ...And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1,4)

Due to the Feast of Pentecost celebration, Jews from every nation were in Jerusalem at this time and news of this unusual event drew a crowd. Several thousand of these Jews heard the 120 speaking in tongues and wondered, “how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” (v8) “And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth *this*?” (v12) They were asking, What is the meaning of this speaking in tongues?

Peter stood up and answered their question. “...*this* is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh:” (v16) “*This*—their speaking in tongues—was God pouring out His Spirit upon all flesh! In verse 33 Peter said this was “...the promise of the Holy Ghost...” and that Jesus had “shed forth *this*, which ye now see and hear.” What were they seeing and hearing? One hundred and twenty people speaking in tongues! It was the beginning of God pouring out the “promise of the Father” upon all flesh.

Peter then told the multitude of Jews, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (v39) The promise wasn’t just for the 120 and it wasn’t just for the Jews there that day, but the Bible says it was for “as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

Did you know that this is exactly how Jesus had said it would be when someone is born of the Spirit? John 3:5, “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Then He told Nicodemus, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.” (v8)

You can’t see the Holy Ghost sweep into a person’s heart, but the Bible says you can hear the “sound thereof,” and “so is EVERY ONE that is born of the Spirit.”

Acts 2 isn’t the only place that you find the fulfillment of Jesus’ words in John chapter three. There are three more recorded occurrences of people receiving their initial experience of the Holy Ghost:

Acts 19:6

“And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.”

Acts 8:16-17

“(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.”

Acts 10:44-46

“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, ...”

In three of these four settings of scripture, the Bible explicitly states that they spoke with tongues when they received the Holy Ghost. And in the fourth setting, however, the very next scripture reveals that, in this setting too, there was indeed an outward evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost!

Acts 8:18

“And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,”

What was it that Simon saw? It was what Jesus said would happen! It was the sound of someone being born of the Spirit! It was the “*This*” which Peter said was prophesied by the prophet Joel and Jesus again had “shed forth *this*, which ye now **see and hear**.” That is what Simon saw!

If you look closely at Acts 10:44-46, you will see that speaking in tongues was how Peter and those with him knew the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost!

Even the Old Testament gives us a glimpse that the “times of refreshing” and the “rest” (both of which have reference to the Holy Ghost) would be accompanied by tongues. “For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing; yet they would not hear.” (Isa. 28:11-12)

So we have an Old Testament prophesy, a prophesy of Jesus, and three settings of scripture which reveal that tongues accompany the baptism of the Holy Ghost or being “born of the Spirit.”

When this happens in a church service, it is obvious. The one giving the message in tongues will take preeminence in the service. Usually, but not always, the message will be preceded by a quiet hush that falls on the congregation as they realize God is about to speak. It is such an awesome thing to think the very God of heaven will take time to speak to us in such a way.

The Gift of Tongues

The gift of “tongues” and the gift of “interpretation of tongues” are two of the gifts of the Spirit that are outlined in I Cor. 12:8-10. The purpose of these gifts is to deliver a message that God wants to give to the church. According to I Corinthians 14, the gift of tongues are never in a language known to the congregation:

(1 Cor 14:2 KJV) For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.

Since the gift of tongues is never in a language known to the congregation, it is necessary that the message in tongues be interpreted or it would not benefit to the church. That is why Paul gives the following instruction:

(1 Cor 14:27-28 KJV) If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

When the gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation of tongues operates in a church service, it is very obvious. The one giving the message in tongues will take preeminence in the service. Usually, but not always, the message will be preceded by a quiet hush that falls on the congregation as they realize God is about to speak. It is such an awesome thing to think the very God of heaven will take time to speak to us in such a way.

Before we leave this point, take special notice again that when the “gift of tongues” is in operation in a service, the congregation does not understand what is being said! It is only through the interpretation of the message by “gift of interpretation of tongues” that the congregation can understand, or, be edified.

Without an interpretation, the tongues serve no purpose and that is why Paul instructs the speaker to keep silent if no interpreter is present. These scriptures *cannot* be reconciled with the belief that tongues were for the purpose of enabling missionaries to preach in languages they did not know. A lot of people confuse what happened on the day of Pentecost with the “gift of tongues.” There are several differences I would like to point out.

1) On the day of Pentecost, they spoke in known languages:

Acts 2:4-8

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them

speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

But the "gift of tongues" is never in a language known to the congregation:

1 Cor 14:2

"For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries."

2)The "gift of tongues" are to be spoken in by at most 2 or 3, and that should be one at a time:

1 Cor 14:27

"If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course;"

But on the day of Pentecost, there was 120 people all speaking in tongues at the same time.

Acts 1:14-15

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)"

Acts 2:1-4

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

3) As seen in the scriptures above, the gift of tongues is required to be interpreted and none of the tongues on the day of Pentecost were interpreted.

Again, the idea that the gift of tongues enabled someone to preach in foreign languages is a misunderstanding of the scriptures. First, if the gift on tongues allowed someone to preach to a people in a foreign language, then you would be speaking to them in their own language and there would be no need for interpretation. Secondly, it would be in a language known to the congregation, and this would contradict I Cor. 14:2. Thirdly, there is not one instance of this occurring in the Bible. On the day of Pentecost, the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem did overhear the 120 as they praised God in their own languages, but it was Peter who preached to them in the common language of the Jews, and it was through that message that they were convicted in their heart and believed the gospel. In other instances of speaking in tongues, it was those being preached to (and not the one preaching) who spoke in tongues. See Acts 10 and Acts 19.

Acts, Chapter 2, is the only place in the Bible where it is recorded that someone spoke in a known language. In fact, in the other places where people spoke in tongues, it was evident that they did NOT speak in a known language. Only one occasion in my life have I known of someone speaking in tongues in a known language. In our church there was a sister and brother who came from Hawaii to the mainland at a young age. She was about 6 years old while he was an infant. I can't remember for sure, but I think they were orphans. He was about 20 years old when they came to the church and he received the Holy Ghost and began to speak in tongues. His sister was amazed and began to tell everyone that he was speaking in the Hawaiian language! So, as God chooses, this still happens today.

In review, the tongues that occur through the infilling of the Holy Ghost:

- 1) Can be in a language known to the congregation
- 2) Can be spoken by different people simultaneously
- 3) Do not have to be interpreted

While the gift of tongues:

- 1) Are never in a language known to the congregation
- 2) Are to be spoken one at a time
- 3) Are required to be interpreted

People so often speak evil of something only because they are not familiar with it or it seems unusual. This is dangerous because we could find out, as Paul did, that we were speaking against God and his people. It is better to be as the people of Berea who, when they heard the gospel for the first time, searched the scriptures daily to see "whether those things were so."