

The Tongues

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In the Beginning

Please read Genesis 11:1-9. When Noah, his wife, their sons and their three wives left the ark of safety from the flood and entered the new earth, they naturally all spoke the same language. Their God told them to "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth," (Genesis 9:1). When Noah's great-grandchildren were adults, they began to build a tower of bricks. Their stated purpose was, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

Notice that their desire was a refusal to obey the charge of filling the earth that had been given to them as humans. The response of Yahweh was "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

This "curse" of "babel" was accomplished with the intent of scattering them from each other. Archeologists have been baffled for many years by the advanced technological artifacts they have found in the plain of Shinar. Various materials found in advanced forms of composition and construction are found at a common strata of earth, implying that they were deposited there during the same period of time. One reason this confuses some archeologists is that their theory of the development of technologies is based on a false presumption regarding the length of time humans took to develop those technologies. Another cause for confusion is the refusal to believe the clear scientific evidence that there was a world-sized flood of the earth. The sudden appearance of advanced skills in the various technologies of handling metals and ceramics, etc, fits nicely in a worldview based on God-in-Spired skills, and a concentration of all of human population at the time. The lack of various technical skills appearing in unity in other places in the earth implies easily that those skills were separated from each other as groups of people could no longer communicate with each other.

When the Day of Pentecost had Fully Come

Please read Acts of the Apostles 2:1-21. The word "tongues" appears in this writing twice: once referring to the fire that sat on each of the people in the house, and once referring to them being able to "speak with other tongues." A third word is related to the picture being drawn by Luke, who wrote the story down: in verse 11, the crowd is commenting on languages, using a different word according to Luke. The Holy Spirit appeared to the believers and then filled them, and they were then able to speak with different tongues. The unbelievers were able to hear them talking about the wonderful works of God in their own dialects. A dialect is a local version of a certain language.

For example, in a broad sense, Spanish in Spain is different from Spanish in Mexico. Spanish in Puerto Rico is different from Spanish in Spain or Mexico. Spanish from community to community in any of the three countries includes locally invented or augmented words. Each person in the large crowd that gathered to hear the strange noise of wind and then of people was able to hear the bumpkins from Galilee speaking with accents from their own home towns.

Peter explained the phenomenon by quoting the Hebrew prophet Joel in his

prophecy about a time when Yahweh would pour out His Spirit on men and women and they would *prophesy*. He was describing the first exhibition of “other tongues” in the earth as being *prophesying* about Yahweh, and everyone who could hear it being able to perfectly understand it. There was confusion regarding the source of the speech (Galileans, who were not schooled in international communication) and the point of the speech (“Whatever could this mean?”), but the subject matter was communicated perfectly. Everyone understood *what was said* perfectly. When humans tried to usurp the mission of God to spread to the ends of the earth and tried to access to God on their own terms instead of His, He dispersed them by causing their communication to fail. When He determined the time was right for empowering them to take truth to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18) and to give them access to Himself, He dispersed them with the power to communicate beyond their abilities. He restored what He had destroyed to an even greater level than it had been when He destroyed it. It became prophetic.

In Gatherings of Believers

The next step to consider in the history of speaking with “other tongues” is how it occurred as the ekklesia of Christ developed. In any city or village in which there were at least 10 Hebrew men, a synagogue was established. The practice developed during one of the exiles imposed on Israel by Yahweh. The word “synagogue” means assembly, or gathering. It developed to mean the building where the gathered ones met, or a meeting of the people who gathered together. The word “church” is an English mis-translation of a Greek word that was not at all similar to synagogue: ekklesia. Ekklesia was a governmental term that had been used in Greek and Roman governments for as much as six centuries when Jesus used the word as Matthew quoted Him in chapter 16 of his writing. Jesus used “ekklesia” to describe to His apostles (apostle - another governmentally used term) what He intended to build on a rock. It designated a group of people who were called out of a larger group to accomplish a purpose, such as the activities of a court or a ruling body or to make decisions such as the design or funding of a project.

“Church,” in contrast to “ekklesia,” was a later invention of men who were more interested in religion than the Kingdom of Heaven. Church and synagogue are pretty synonymous. Praise, fellowship and offerings happen in church. Ekklesia is ordained to do work.

Please read 1 Corinthians chapter 12. When the ekklesias gather for meetings, they had a meal, and then sought to encounter Jesus by interacting with each other in prayer, testimony, praise, prophecy, teaching, encouraging each other, and admonishing each other. These acts of Jesus using various people to do things in these meetings or in the streets or markets between the meetings they called “gifts” that He was giving His people. Activities that they offered to Him were called prayer or praise or worship. What He offered to them was called “gifts.” One of the gifts was called “tongues.” A related gift was called “interpretation of tongues.”

Please read 1 Corinthians chapter 14. Paul compared the gift of prophecy to the gift of tongues. One point he made was that if a gifted person intended to encourage or build up the group, he or she should be certain that the gift was “unwrapped.” If the gift was prophecy, the recipient could hear the words and judge their validity. If the gift was in a language the intended recipient could not understand, someone with the “unwrapping” gift of interpretation of tongues should add their part of the ministry, making it to be heard in the language of the recipient.

During the event that occurred on the day of Pentecost mentioned in Acts chapter 2, it is possible that what happened was that the believers were all speaking in the same language, which should have been unintelligible to all, but that the Spirit of God was giving all of the unbelievers the supernatural ability to hear and understand it as if it was being spoken in their home dialect. Another possibility is that the believers were each speaking in all those different dialects, though they had not learned them.

There are two races of humans. One is descendants of Adam, the other is the children of God. They all begin as sons or daughters of Adam. If they have faith in the effect of the death and resurrection of Jesus on them, their human spirit dies and is replaced by a spirit that is born of God. As offspring of God, their spirits are perfect (1 John 3:9). They still have the same flesh (which is a place where sin dwells: Romans 7:7-25) and initially still have the same souls (mind, heart, emotions, will). Their souls are transformed as they listen to the Spirit of God and obey His will instead of the will that prefers the things valued by their flesh (Romans 12:1,2)

These new spirits are their true identities. The Spirit of God is able to speak to our spirits and communicate things that our minds cannot comprehend (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Our spirits can grasp what we are saying when we speak in tongues, but our minds cannot (1 Corinthians 14:14-17).

Please read 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 15, through the end of chapter 13. This is a description of the practicing of “manners” or “protocol” when exercising my gift and receiving Jesus through the practices of others who are learning to use their gifts. It is the “excellent **way**” (12:31) of being the ekklesia of Christ: both how to be a host of the presence of Jesus and how to accept the hosting of His presence through other believers.

The End of the Time of Gifts

What is indicated as the end of the time of spiritual gifts in the Holy Book? Two time lines are mentioned. One is in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Here, Paul was contrasting the *practice* of manifesting, or “revealing” Jesus (chapter 12) with the *manner* in which it should be done. He described here the “more excellent way.” Part of his discussion is a declaration that even the most powerful gifts are not “gifts”, but liabilities, if they are not offered *in love*. Love never fails. Gifts fail. One day, gifts will no longer be necessary. Love will always be necessary. One day, there will no longer be spiritual gifts of knowledge, or prophecy, or tongues. That day will be identifiable by the coming of “the perfect.” Please examine the chapter carefully to determine whether he explains what he is calling “the perfect.” Do you see an answer there? I don’t, either.

Some people, who are not experiencing the operation of the gifts of tongues or prophecy in their fellowships, have declared that “the perfect” was the King James Version of the Book. I suppose that since the text here does not make that declaration, and that one definition of “cult” is a group of people who base some of their teaching on extra-Biblical revelation, that these teachers should be classified as a cult. A second supposition regarding teachers of this idea could be that the last prophetic word to the ekklesia came through them, and that this revelation was “the perfect” in this passage of Scripture. Pardon me for finding humor in the ridiculousness of such serious doctrinal errors.

A second time line is mentioned in Ephesians chapter 4. In this chapter and the beginning of the next, Paul wrote about Spiritual gifts and the proper practice of them, including the lifestyle that should accompany their practice. In the process of describing these two subjects, the use and the method of use of gifts, he mentioned the time frame within which believers would need them in verses 13 through 16. The pivotal word for

determining the time of the end of gifts being exercised by believers is “till” in verse 13. In some translations it is translated “until”. It is translating James Strong’s word number G:3360. Strong defined it as meaning “as far as, i.e. up to a certain point (as a preposition, of extent [denoting the terminus, whereas G:891 refers especially to the space of time or place intervening] or a conjunction); translated in KJV: till, (un-) to, until.”

Clearly, Paul wrote here that “until” we have achieved certain accomplishments in the ekklesia, we need apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists, so that the members (that means “parts”) of the body of Jesus, the ekklesia, are equipped to do their ministries, so that the body of Christ is built up, or edified (by each member doing its part by using their Spiritual gifts - verse 16). Those accomplishments are:

- * we all come to the unity of the faith
- * we all come to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God
- * we become a “perfect man” – a mature manifestation of Jesus in the earth
- * we come to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ
- * we are no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting
- * we, speaking the truth in love, grow up in all things into Him Who is the Head (Christ)
- * from Him as the Head, the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love

Perhaps you have seen something I have not seen yet, but I have not even found a *fellowship* that is walking in *half* of that. Seeing it in the whole body of Christ is still a bit “futuristic” in my assessment of our condition. My deduction from these two mentions of times when gifts will no longer be present (and no longer desperately needed) is that in one case, the time is not discernable due to the lack of clarity in the text of how to discern it (what is “the perfect”, and how will I know it “has come”?) and in the other case the time is unquestionably discernable as “not yet”.

The Gift of Tongues Today

The only questions I see that need to be answered now are “What is the proper *method* of using this gift?”, and “What should be the *result* of its proper use?” The proper method includes the descriptions of love and unity in 1 Corinthians 12:14 through 13:13. Other instruction includes verse 13 of chapter 14: pray that you may interpret what is spoken in tongues. Paul mentioned *order* in a gathering in verses 26-33 of chapter 14: limit the number of people who exercise the gift, and don’t use it if no one is present who has the interpretive gift. In verses 13 through 15, I learn that I could *sing* in tongues or *speak* in tongues or *pray* in tongues.

The results of the gift of tongues include:

- * I can build myself up (14:4)
- * I can talk to God (14:2)
- * I can speak mysteries (14:2)
- * I can bring revelation, knowledge, prophecies, or teaching to the body, IF the tongue is interpreted (14:6-12)

Other Errors

Two mistakes made by some teachers regarding the gift of tongues are based on two different Scriptures. The first is related to 1 Corinthians 14. The error is teaching that praying “with my spirit” means that I am praying “in tongues.” Paul wrote here that if I pray

in tongues, my spirit understands. He did not write that the only way to pray with my spirit was in tongues. I can pray with my spirit in English. My mind is part of my soul, along with my will and my emotions. My mind is not yet perfected, and cannot receive the things of God, though my spirit can. My spirit is quite capable of praying in English.

The second mistake is based on passages such as Ephesians 6:18. The troubling phrase is “praying in the Spirit.” Just as Paul used the phrase “walking in the Spirit” in various letters of his, he mentioned here “praying in the Spirit.” Walking in the Spirit does not mean walking in tongues, but making decisions and doing my deeds *under the influence of* or *in the power of* the Spirit of God. Praying in Him has the same meaning, but limited to prayer.

It does not at all imply the use of the gift of tongues. I can be praying out loud or silently, in public or in private, in tongues or in English, and not be praying in the Spirit, because I am praying wrong (James 4:1-5). I can also be praying any of these ways under the direction of the Spirit and be “praying in the Spirit” (Romans 8:26,27).

A third set of mistakes taught regarding the gift of tongues is that it is either the *only evidence* we should accept that a person has been baptized in or by the Holy Spirit, the *only evidence* that we are born-again, or that *every believer* is required to have it.

There is no Scripture that says that it must be practiced or the Spirit has not baptized us. There are Scriptures that indicate that, because the believers who were present heard newly Spirit-baptized believers speaking in tongues, they took it as evidence of the baptism, but there are also Scriptures that refer to newly Spirit-baptized believers prophesying, and not speaking in tongues. The test I take as evidence of having been baptized by the Spirit is examining the baptized person for the Spirit’s fruit (Galatians 5:22,23). It is much more difficult to fake, and more closely matches Jesus’ instruction for discerning a nature: “You will know them by their fruits,” (Matthew 7:16-20).

The teachings that we are not saved until we have spoken in tongues, and that everyone has the gift, are very clearly against the instruction of Paul:

- * We are “sons of God” *through faith* in Jesus (Galatians 3:26)
- * Prophecy is a better gift than tongues (1 Corinthians 14:4)
- * Tongues are a sign to unbelievers, not believers (14:22)
- * No single gift is exercised by every believer, but each should expect to have different gifts (12:4-31, especially verses 10 and 30)

A Better Gift

Speaking in tongues is popular in some circles and attributed to demons in others. If I am moved to pursue the gift to avoid persecution by silly error-promoters, I am silly myself. If I attribute to a demon what is offered to the body of Christ by the Spirit of Christ, I am blaspheming the Holy Spirit, which is unpardonable (Mark 3:28-30).

Paul taught in the passages that you read in this study that prophecy is more useful in ministering to the body of Christ, and that you should pursue it if you are going to pursue a gift. Ask the Spirit for it. Ask Him to give you a mentor who is experienced in the exercise of the gift, and who is mature in love.