

## A WESLEYAN VIEW OF THE SPIRIT'S GIFT OF TONGUES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The Gift of the Law on Mount Sinai, the gift of His Son through the Incarnation at Bethlehem, and the gift of the Holy Spirit with His varied manifestations at Jerusalem during the Jews' Feast of Pentecost constitute three of God's greatest and most benevolent acts toward man. However, it is only with the last of these three divine gifts that we are concerned primarily in this study, but more especially with the accompanying divine phenomenon of the "other tongues," or different languages as recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts. Luke records this phenomenon, as it occurred initially, in Acts 2:1-4 thus:

"And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place, and suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire, and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4). (1)

Luke says further, in verse 6, "and when this sound was heard (the "sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind," v.2) the multitude came together (some say as many as three million may have been present for the feast (2)) and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language." Again the historian of this event remarks in verses 8 and 11, concerning the reaction of the multitude, "how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born? . . . we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God."

### II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SPIRIT'S GIFT OF TONGUES AT PENTECOST

Concerning the Greek word *glossai*, translated "tongues," Thayer understands it to mean the gift of foreign tongues." (3) It is a logical, moral and biblical necessity that any purported miracle should demonstrate its moral purpose and value in order to validate its claim to be miraculous. Rail has well said that "within Christian writings... miracles must be judged by the principles of the Christian faith and according to their moral meaning and spiritual value." (4) On the basis of these principles, the divine miracle of the gift of different languages at Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, was amply justified by the fruits of the gospel proclaimed through these media, in that about three thousand persons from the assembled multitude were converted to Christ and added to the Church (v.41).

It must be faced in all honesty from the very outset that the word *unknown*, in relation to the Bible "gift of tongues," does not occur in the original Greek of the New Testament, nor is it used in the American Standard or other modern versions. The word *unknown* occurs only in italics in the King James Version of the New Testament, indicating that it was added by the translators, and that misleadingly, in a futile attempt to clarify the meaning of the word "tongues." Thus, properly speaking there is no "unknown tongue" in the original language of the New Testament. The Greek word *glossa*, (5) meaning a tongue or a language or a nation of people distinguished by their language, is consistently used in its various forms throughout the New Testament, except where the Greek word *dialektos* (dialect), meaning "conversation, speech, discourse or language . . . the tongue or language

peculiar to any people," (6) is employed.

Webster defines the word tongue as "The power of communication through speech . . . Act of speaking; esp., a spoken language," and the new Random House Dictionary defines a tongue as "the language of a particular people, region, or nation, i.e., the Hebrew tongue. A people or nation distinguished by its language" (Isa. 66:18; Rev. 5:9). Hence a tongue, in this sense, is an articulate, intelligible speech or language used for the purpose of communicating symbolized ideas or judgments from one person to another. This definition of a tongue accords with the biblical use of the word throughout the New Testament. With the occurrence of the miracle of languages at Pentecost the disciples "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4), and the multitude exclaimed, "How hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born? . . . we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:8, 11).

It was the more amazing to the multitudes that they should hear the disciples speaking to them distinctly and intelligibly in their varied languages since these men were Galileans and presumably uneducated and provincial. F. F. Bruce remarks on this fact that

The reversal of the curse of Babel is probably in the narrator's mind . . . The Galilean dialect was so distinctive and difficult for non-Galileans to follow that the disciples released from the peculiarities of their local speech and their sudden capacity for speaking in tongues understood by the motley crowds then in Jerusalem could not fail to be remarked. When once the attention of the people had thus been attracted, Peter seized the opportunity to stand up with the other Apostles, and addressed all who were within earshot. (7)

Again, in the case of Cornelius' household, it is said that the Jews accompanying Peter heard them speak with tongues (glossai, languages) and magnify ("extolling," RSV; "exalting," NASV; "acclaiming the greatness of God," NEB; "glorifying," Phillips) God" (Acts 10:46). One observes:

It was a gracious accommodation to man that God provided the miracle in the realm of languages . . . Whatever sophistication any of us may acquire in using other languages, we will always find a special appeal to a message given to us "in the tongue in which we were born." That is to say, even if the polyglot multitude in Jerusalem might have "made some sort of sense" out of a one - language presentation on the Day of Pentecost, the impact would have been immeasurably less than it was. This suggests. . . God's adaptation of His dealing in our human involvement in the "mother tongue. (8)

Vincent notes that the "other tongues" of Acts 2:4 means

strictly different, from their native tongues, and also different tongues spoken by the different apostles (cf. Matt. 4:24). . (The Spirit) kept giving them the language and the appropriate words as the case required from time to time. It would seem that each apostle was speaking to a group, or to individuals.

The general address to the multitude followed from the lips of Peter. (9)

To the objection of some that this was not so much a miracle wrought on the disciples, causing them to speak in other languages, as a miracle of hearing wrought on the listeners, Wesley replies:

The miracle was not in the ears of the hearers (as some have unaccountably supposed) but in the

mouth of the speakers. And this family praising God together, with the tongues of all the world, was an earnest that the whole world should in due time praise God in their various tongues. (10)

Bengel observes on this incident that the disciples, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, began

to speak languages of which they had been before entirely ignorant. They did not speak now and then a word of another tongue, or stammer out some broken sentence, but spoke each language as readily, properly, and elegantly as if it had been their mother-tongue. They spoke not from any previous thought, but as the Spirit gave them utterance. He furnished them with the matter as well as the language. (11)

Likewise when this phenomenon occurred at Ephesus, Luke states that "they spake with tongues, and prophesied" (Acts 19:6). Both Clarke and Matthew Henry take the position that this "prophesying" was preaching in the miraculously given "tongues" (glossai languages) to people who could not have heard and understood the gospel message distinctly otherwise at that time.

### **III. THE RATIONALE FOR THE SPIRIT'S GIFT OF TONGUES AT PENTECOST**

The Spirit's gift of tongues at Pentecost, in the foregoing sense, was necessary to meet the demands of the opportune situation that existed at Jerusalem during the Pentecostal feast when fifteen different linguistic groups, perhaps as many as three million people, were present and most would soon return to their respective countries to carry the gospel which they had heard.

There were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound (the sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind) was heard, 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, Behold, are not all these that speak Galileans? and how hear we every man in his own language wherein we were born? (Acts 2:5-8).

Blaikie notes that these Jews, "unable to pay due regard to the ordinances of Moses in the different countries of their dispersion . . . seem to have made very great effort to come to Jerusalem to the annual festivals." (12) There follows a list of fifteen different nations which were represented at the Jerusalem Pentecost, into whose countries Jews of the dispersion (Diaspora) had been born, and whose languages they spoke, together with many gentile proselytes to the Jews' faith and "God fearers" from among the gentiles who were present at the Jerusalem Feast of Pentecost.

The objection that these "multitudes" of the dispersion would not have come to the Feast of Pentecost had they not known they would get much from a one-language observance can hardly be sustained. First, it was expected, if not actually legally required, of every Israelite to attend these feasts at Jerusalem and thus appear before the Lord, if such was within his ability. (13) Second, religious worship is a greater influence on men than religious language, important as is the latter. Third, in like manner every faithful Moslem is required once in his lifetime, if at all possible, to make the Pilgrim-age to Mecca (the Hal), and longs to do so. "In case of incapability a Moslem may send a substitute on this sacred duty." (14) Certainly a vast percentage do not understand intelligibly the Arabic language, even though they may have memorized sections of the Koran. And even a greater number have no knowledge of the Arabic language used in the religious services at Mecca.

The Diaspora is a term referring to the Jews who were scattered throughout the ancient world during and following the Exile. In all, there were five of these dispersions which took place before the coming

of Christ. The first occurred in about 722 B.C., when the Ten Northern Tribes of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians, taken into exile, and eventually scattered among the nations. The second occurred in about 586 B.C., when the Southern Kingdom was defeated and the Jews were carried into captivity by the Babylonians and subsequently planted in separate colonies throughout the whole of the 127 provinces of the Persian empire, all the way from India to Africa, by the Persians who succeeded the Babylonians (Esther 1:1; 3:8-15). It is common knowledge that the Jews of the Northern Kingdom never returned from their exile, and that only a small percentage of the Jews of the Southern Kingdom returned to Palestine after some seventy years of exile. Concerning the other three pre-Christian Jewish dispersions, Benjamin W. Robinson states:

During the third century B.C., when Egypt controlled Palestine, Jews migrated in large numbers to Alexandria, so named after Alexander the Great. There they formed a considerable colony in the city, adopted the Greek language, and translated the Old Testament into Greek. In the second century B.C., when Syrian power became dominant in Palestine, the Jews migrated northward and settled in large numbers around Antioch. They went farther into Cilicia, following the line of march of Alexander over into the cities of Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece. After Pompey and the Roman armies conquered Palestine in the first century B.C. the dispersion of the Jews gradually reached to the ends of the Roman Empire. (15)

In order to comprehend the fuller significance of the necessity for the miracle of other languages on the day of Pentecost, it is necessary to examine briefly the character of the hearers to whom the gospel was preached at the Jerusalem Feast of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2. Luke states that there were dwelling at Jerusalem, 'Jews (some omit the word "Jews"), devout men, from every nation under heaven' (Acts 2:5). This vast multitude would have consisted of the Jerusalem and Judaeans Jews and proselytes who resided more or less permanently in Jerusalem. However, as previously noted, there was also a vast host of the Jews, together with their proselytes and God-fearers, present from the lands of the dispersion.

The language problem at Pentecost, represented by this "multitude," is suggested by the presence of "Parthians," "Medes," "Elamites," and Mesopotamian Jews, from the nations beyond the Roman Empire and the influence of Rome where the Israelites had been carried captive and scattered by the Assyrians and Babylonians in 722 and 586 B.C. (cf. II Kings 17:6). These Jews "had by this time ceased to use the Hebrew and had adopted the mother tongues of the countries whither they had been scattered." (16) "Mesopotamia," the chief Jewish center of which was Babylon, famed for its rabbinical schools, and formerly the point of the "confusion of tongues" at the halting of the construction of the Tower of Babel, receives special notice by Luke. "Judea," probably as distinguished from Galilee, the home of Christ's disciples, was naturally represented. "Cappadocia," "Pontus," "Asia," "Phrygia" and "Pamphylia" represented the countries of Asia Minor from which foreign-born Jews and proselytes had come to Pentecost. Egypt, where according to Philo, the famed Greco-Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, a million Jews resided and formed a large part of the population of the city and imbibed much of the Hellenic culture, including language, having been lured there by Alexander the Great, sent its representatives to the Jerusalem Pentecost. North African "Libya" and the North African Greek city of "Cyrene," a quarter of whose great population consisted of Jews with full citizenship rights, who had been sent there by Ptolemy Soter, also sent representatives to the Jerusalem Feast of Pentecost. It is of special interest that it was Simon of Cyrene who bore the cross of Christ enroute to Calvary (Matt. 27:32), that there were those of the synagogue of the Cyrenians who disputed with Stephen on the occasion of his martyrdom (Acts 6:9), that Christian representatives of Cyrene first bore the gospel to the Greek population of Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:20), and that there was a Christian prophet, Lucius of Cyrene, in the Antioch church

who played an important part in launching the first Christian missionary journey of Paul and Barnabus (Acts 13:1). "Strangers" and "sojourners from Rome," both "Jews" and "proselytes," were present. And finally, inhabitants of the large Mediterranean Island of "Crete" and of the "Arabian" peninsula are named as having been present at Pentecost. All of these born Jews, together with their proselytes and God-fearers, had come for the Pentecostal Feast.

These dwellers at Jerusalem, strangers, Hellenistic Jews, Gentile proselytes and "God fearers" exclaimed, "we hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11). Even if it be allowed that Luke's reference to dialects should indicate local variations in the Greek and Aramaic languages, it is necessary to note that dialects may and often do vary so greatly as to amount practically to different languages, as far as the effective communication of the gospel of Christ is concerned. Therefore, a miracle of speaking would be necessary to cover these varied dialects at Pentecost, to say nothing of the distinct languages that may have been represented. And second, besides the Jerusalem and Hellenic Jews present at Pentecost, there were many proselytes and "God fearers." A proselyte was an individual of non-Jewish nationality who had come to see in the Jewish religion the true way of worship and was fully converted to the Jewish religion and accepted all its regulations as binding upon him, including circumcision. While the "God fearer" resembled the proselyte in being of non-Jewish nationality, and in his conviction of the spiritual truth of the Jew's monotheistic and noble ethical ideals, he was unlike the proselyte in that he did not submit to the elaborate Jewish ceremonialism and strict legalistic requirements. Nor was he willing to assume the social disadvantages imposed upon gentile proselytes to Judaism. These "God-fearers" did, however, readily accept the Christian faith which was not shackled by the Jewish requirements, and thus they constituted the greater percentage of the Christian converts from the synagogues of the empire, as also those in Jerusalem. (17) Consequently, while he was permitted to worship in the Jews' synagogue, he was regarded by them as ceremonially unclean and was considered as an outsider. Many more "God fearers" were converted to the Christian faith than were Jews or proselytes. These "God fearers" were found both in Jerusalem and out in the countries of the empire and beyond. The total of the Jewish communities outside Jerusalem may have reached 150 by the time of Paul, Benjamin Robinson thinks. (18)

Earle states concerning Acts 1:7, in which the multitudes at Pentecost recognized the Christians who spoke in their respective dialects as Galileans, that "Galileans were noted as narrow provincialists. It was doubly remarkable, therefore, that they were speaking many different languages" (19) (cf. Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59).

Earle further remarks that the expression

'Our own language' is literally 'our very own dialect.' While these were evidently all Jews (at least in religion), they had been born and brought up in different lands, and the language of their own locality constituted their mother tongue. (20)

Likewise Blackwelder states:

At Pentecost the speakers were Galileans (2:7). Their natural languages were Aramaic and Koine Greek. The audience was composed of Jews and proselytes (2:10) who had assembled at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. These visitors knew (for the most part) Aramaic and Koine Greek, but there were local dialects used in the various countries from which they had come. To their amazement these pilgrims heard the Galileans declaring the things of God in the manifold dialects of the Diaspora. Under the impetus of the Holy Spirit, each Christian was speaking in a

language that he had not acquired, and it was understood immediately by representatives from the land familiar with it . . .

Thus Jesus' promise, given in connection with the Great Commission, that believers would speak in *kainais glossais* (Mark 16:17), (if this passage should be genuine) was demonstrated at the Pentecost Feast when the disciples presented the gospel to strangers in their own vernacular. The linguistic ability imparted on that occasion was symbolical of the universality of the gospel (cf. Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 14:6). It showed that God's revelation is not limited to the Jews nor the Hebrew language (cf. Joel 2:28-32).

The Lukan account leaves no doubt about the intelligibility of the utterances. Three times it is stated that the disciples were heard speaking in the definite dialects of the listeners (Acts 2:6, 8, 11). In verse 11, the dative of the strong possessive pronoun *hemetrais* is used with the term *glossai* as the hearers call the vocal expressions 'our own languages.' Each listener recognized immediately the indigenous dialect of his native land (v.8). (21)

Some scholars think there were about 250 synagogues in Jerusalem. Millers note that by A.D. 70 Jerusalem had scores of synagogues and that they were also found in such rural towns as Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), with many located in cities such as Damascus (Acts 9:29). These authorities state that estimates run as high as four to seven million Jews of the Diaspora who had more than a thousand synagogues by this date. (22) Another authority states: "The Rabbinical writers say that there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem; and though this must be an exaggeration, yet no doubt all shades of Hellenistic and Aramic opinions found a home in the common metropolis." (23)

These assembled multitudes at Pentecost heard the Galilean disciples preaching Jesus, his resurrection and consequent universal lordship, "the mighty works of God" (v. 11), "every man in our own language wherein we were born " (Acts 2:8b).

From the foregoing considerations it becomes evident that this initial occurrence of "tongues" is to be understood as the use of the bona fide languages and/or dialects of the people present at Pentecost when the Spirit was outpoured, who otherwise would have been incapable of hearing intelligibly the good news that Jesus Christ was risen (Acts 2:32, 22, 27, 41), and that they were spoken by men who themselves were ignorant of the languages which they were using. It has been well said that "we see in this event, which seemed to obliterate the barriers of nationality and language, a reversal of the separation and confusion of tongues (24) (cf. Gen. 11).

The language problem in the Roman empire, and the regions beyond Rome, has long constituted one of the major difficulties in understanding the divine gift of languages as that phenomenon appears in the New Testament. However, even though the Koine Greek has been considered the universal language of the ancient world in the first century, it must be recognized that there were vast numbers of people who could not communicate intelligibly in the Greek and were dependent upon their native dialects for a meaningful understanding of the gospel. (See Appendix on Languages.)

The miracle of the proclamation of the gospel in the different languages of those present for the Jewish Pentecost, which resulted in the great spiritual awakening that followed the outpouring of the Spirit, appears to anticipate the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; cf. Acts 1:8), as suggested by the universal representation of redeemed humanity which is so vividly depicted in the book of Revelation. The record reads:

And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

And again the Revelator states:

After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of a/I tribes and peoples and 'tongues,' standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; and they cried with a loud voice, saying, salvation unto our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb (Rev. 7:9-10).

#### **IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE SPIRIT'S GIFT OF TONGUES AT PENTECOST**

The gift of tongues was God's extraordinary provision at Pentecost. While holding that "the gift of tongues was an ecstatic utterance of praise," a position impossible to defend when all the facts of Scripture are considered, Maclean nevertheless admits that almost all of the early Church Fathers, including Origen (185?-254?), Chrysostom (347?-407), Theodoret (396-457), Gregory of Nyssa (331-394), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329-457), understood this miraculous gift of tongues, as recorded in Acts, to consist of bona fide languages or dialects given for the purpose of evangelizing the nations. The proclaiming of the "mighty works of God," primarily the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and His consequent universal lordship, was made intelligible to the people of the fifteen nations enumerated in Acts 2 by reason of the miracle of languages, with the result that some three thousand were initially converted to Christ and added to the church (Acts 2:41). This event in itself is sufficient to establish the fact that the divine gift of languages was for the purpose of evangelization.

In perfect accord with the evangelistic purpose of the gift of tongues on the day of Pentecost is the prediction of Isaiah, which prediction looks ultimately to the Gospel Age and quite probably embodies Pentecost itself. Says the prophet: "The time cometh, that I will gather all nations and tongues (Italics added); and they shall come, and shall see my glory and I will set a sign among them . . . and they shall declare my glory among the nations" (Isa. 66:18, 19). And it is in conjunction with the Great Commission that Mark records the promise of the phenomenon of "new tongues" (though the genuineness of this passage is highly suspect; Mark 16:15-17).

#### **V. CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE SPIRIT'S GIFT OF TONGUES AT PENTECOST**

In summary, the occurrence of the miracle of "other tongues" (languages) at Pentecost was manifold in its significance.

- (1) The miracle was wrought in and through the Christian disciples at Pentecost by the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, by whom they were filled on that occasion (Acts 2:4).
- (2) It was administered in a practical way through the disciples under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:46), and thus it consisted of Spirit-inspired utterances," and not of a miracle of hearing by the multitude, as some have mistakenly supposed.
- (3) It was made necessary by the presence of the multitudes speaking some fifteen different languages and/or dialects at Pentecost, who could not otherwise have heard intelligibly the gospel of Christ's

resurrection from the dead, which provided salvation for them (Acts 2:11, 32-36).

(4) It consisted of correct and intelligible bona fide languages and/or dialects which were clearly understood by the hearers (Acts 1:8, 11, 37).

(5) It served as the vehicle for God's message that produced in many of the hearers the divinely intended result of repentance unto salvation (Acts 2:37-39).

(6) It was instrumental in bringing about the conversion of approximately three thousand hearers at Pentecost who were baptized and added to the Christian church (Acts 2:41).

(7) It was attested as a genuine miracle by its moral value manifested in the spiritual enlightenment, conviction, and conversion of about three thousand people at the Pentecostal Feast.

(8) Luke's record in Acts 2 is the most clearly definitive account of the "gift of tongues" which we have in the New Testament. Though tongues are referred to definitely in three other recognized genuine New Testament passages (Acts 10, 19, and I Cor. 12-14), it is only in Acts 2:1-11 that the meaning is made explicit. Here it is manifestly a divinely given vehicle of linguistic communication for the evangelization of the multitudes in a situation that demanded and justified it, and as a token of the universal message and mission of the Christian gospel.

(9) While First Corinthians was probably written somewhat earlier than Acts (I Cor. c. A.D. 55 or 56 - Acts c. A.D. 63 (25)), the question of tongues did not arise at Corinth until nearly a quarter of a century after its occurrence at Pentecost. (26) Luke, the author of Acts, was the companion and fellow worker of Paul during most of his second and third missionary journeys, as also during his two years Caesarean imprisonment, and his voyage to Rome and imprisonment there. (27) Consequently it is most certain that Paul would have supplied him information for the Acts record covering those periods when Luke was not with him (especially Acts 10 and 19), and would have approved the interpretation of the events that Luke recorded, though Luke may have gotten his information concerning Pentecost and other events up to the appearance of Paul from other sources, unless indirectly through Paul, (see Acts 8:1-4; 9). In any event his thorough acquaintance with Paul's views on the subject of "tongues, as also other theological issues, seems almost certain. There is absolutely no biblical evidence of any difference of opinion between Luke and Paul on this "tongues" question, or any other issue in fact. Therefore, on the basis of these facts we would agree with Black-welder when he says,

We may assume that the viewpoint of Acts is decisive for what Paul writes in I Corinthians 14 . . .

Some expositors begin by attempting to reconstruct the situation at Corinth and then either try to make Luke's account fit what they surmise occurred at Corinth or suggest that there were two different categories of the gift of tongues. Such an approach is unsatisfactory, for it is Luke who describes what the gift was. Paul writes (to the Corinthians) to correct false ideas regarding it. Therefore, if we are to avoid speculation about speaking in tongues, we must get our bearings from the basic treatment which is given in Acts 2:1-11 . . . If the true gift of glossolalia is manifested, it will be according to the pattern of Acts 2:4-11 (28)

Blackwelder is on solid ground when he denies that there is any scriptural evidence that anyone under the influence of the Holy Spirit ever spoke in an "unknown tongue." Since glossolalia means languages,

and languages are means of personal communication, they will necessarily be known to some people. (29)

(10) That the gift of tongues, as recorded in Acts 2, was for evangelization purposes, rather than for the personal edification of the believer, as is claimed by the advocates of the "unknown tongues" doctrine, is further evident from the absence of any mention of tongues in Acts 2 beyond its initial employment in preaching the gospel to the polyglot multitudes present at the Feast of Pentecost.

After the approximate three thousand converts had been baptized and were received into the fellowship of the church (2:41), no further mention of tongues is found in relation to these believers in the Acts record. Indeed they were edified in the apostles' "doctrine," "fellowship," "breaking of bread," "prayers," acts of charity, rejoicing, "singleness of heart," and by "praising God," with profound resultant spiritual and moral influence on their non-Christian neighbors. This beneficent influence produced converts to Christianity among them daily (2:42-47), but nowhere is there further mention of tongues among these converts. Nor was there further need for tongues now that the multitudes at Pentecost had heard the gospel distinctly and intelligibly in their own languages.

(11) It is necessary to note that a careful examination of the structure of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, clearly reveals that the burden of his message concerned the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ with His consequent lordship, facts which were designed of God to produce repentance and saving faith in the minds and lives of his hearers (Acts 2:22-40). It is only Luke, the author of Acts, and not Peter, who records that the disciples spoke forth the gospel by miraculous aid in the various languages of the people present. This concern with the death, resurrection and lordship of Jesus Christ likewise characterized Peter's subsequent sermons, as also those of Stephen and Paul. There is no evidence that the thought of tongues was in any of their minds, if we are to judge from the contents of their recorded sermons. Peter's words, "he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear" (Acts 2:33) necessarily refer to the transforming effects of the gospel on the hearers under the Spirit's energy which they observed ("ye see"), and the fact that they heard distinctly the gospel in their own languages ("and hear"; cf. Acts 2:11).

(12) Thus it may reasonably be allowed, within the foregoing framework of interpretation, that the divine gift and use of languages in Jerusalem at Pentecost signified the beginning of the universal missionary program of the gospel as it is set forth clearly by Christ in Acts 1:8, though Christ does not there, nor anywhere else in fact (unless Mark 16:16-17 be credited as genuine), mention "tongues."

Furthermore, there are but two clear references to the gift of tongues in the Book of Acts besides the incident in Acts 2, and they both afford an adequate justification for the gift by reason of the evangelistic opportunities they afforded. One is at Caesarea where the household of Cornelius (a "God-fearer," Acts 10:22) was baptized with the Spirit and spoke in tongues (glossai Acts 10:46) glorifying or exalting God. Cornelius was a Centurian, or more likely a captain of a cohort (from 300 to 600 soldiers, RHD). These soldiers were recruited from various parts of the Roman Empire and consequently represented a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds. Thus the message of the gospel could be conveyed more intelligibly to them in their own languages (glossai languages) by this special gift of God.

On this incident Clarke observes: "They had got new hearts as well as new tongues (glossai, languages); and, having believed with the heart unto righteousness, their tongues made confession unto salvation; and God was magnified for the mercy which he had imparted." (30)

Twice while relating this incident before the Jerusalem church, Peter identifies it with the disciples' reception of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying phenomena at Pentecost (see Acts 11:15, 17). Clarke says on verse 17: "... the Holy Spirit, and its various gifts and graces, in the same way and in the same measure in which he gave them to us Jews." (31) Henry and Scott comment on Acts 10:46 thus:

They spake with tongues which they had never learned. They magnified God, they spake of Christ and the benefits of redemption, concerning which Peter had been preaching to the glory of God . . . Whatever gift we are endowed with, we ought to honor God with it, and particularly the gift of speaking. (32)

The other, third and last, occurrence of tongues in Acts (19:6) was at Ephesus where Paul laid his hands upon the twelve disciples and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit and spoke with other tongues (glossais, languages) and prophesied. Ephesus was a great linguistic, as also religious and cultural, center, comprised of people from all over the ancient world. The principle attraction was the worship of Diana or Artemis, the multi-breasted Asiatic fertility goddess. These twelve disciples likely became the twelve elders of the Church of Ephesus who helped Paul evangelize western Asia Minor during his three-years stay at Ephesus. Thus these languages in which they spoke would have enabled them to accomplish their evangelistic task. This interpretation is supported by Clarke thus:

They received the miraculous gift of different languages; and in those languages they taught the people the great doctrines of the Christian religion; for this appears to be the meaning of the word proefateuon, prophesied, as it is used above. (v. 6) (33)

Henry and Scott understand this occurrence, recorded in Acts 19:6, in like manner with Clarke.

. . . they spake with tongues, and prophesied, as the apostles did, and the first gentile converts (Acts 10:15, 17). They had the spirit of prophecy, that they might understand the mysteries of the kingdom of God themselves; and the gift of tongues, that they might preach them ("the mysteries of the Kingdom of God") to every nation and language (34) (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9-10).

In each of the three foregoing occurrences of the miraculous gift of languages we have witnessed their justifying need for the effective evangelization of the polyglot unconverted peoples. But, also, each of these three instances constituted a new ethnic and geographic challenge for the introduction and advancement of the Christian religion. At Pentecost the polyglot Jews, including proselytes and Godfearers, were confronted with the gospel in languages intelligible to them. At Caesarea the Roman gentile world, represented by the ubiquitous military forces, received the gift of languages that they might the more effectively spread the faith which they had received. And at Ephesus the Asian gentiles may well have represented the great ancient Greek and non-Roman Asiatic world. As Artemis (or Diana), an imported Asiatic fertility goddess, whose main image was at Ephesus, was worshiped by "all Asia and the world" (Acts 19:27, RSV), so from Asia Minor the gospel might spread to all of Asia and the ancient world.

(13) Finally, as it is beyond the author's stated purpose in this study to deal with the problem of "tongues" as that problem appears in I Corinthians chapters 12 through 14, only brief reference will be made to it here.

The tongues problem at Corinth arose more than twenty years after the initial gift of language occurred at the Jerusalem Pentecost. Paul was thoroughly familiar with the Pentecostal and Caesarean event through his associations with Peter, Luke, and others who had been present. Furthermore, Paul was personally involved in the occurrence at Ephesus. Nowhere does he attempt to make any distinction between any of these later occurrences of "tongues," where he considers them genuine, or of the initial occurrence at Pentecost. Had there been differences in the genuine occurrence of tongues, if such existed, at the later events, it is most improbable that Paul would have failed to mention such differences. Therefore it is safe to assume that the occurrence of the gift of tongues as described by Luke in Acts 2 is the norm by which the three subsequent New Testament occurrences must be interpreted, insofar as they were genuine, bona fide gifts from God.

That Paul was forced to deal with the "tongues" problem at Corinth in at least three, and possibly four, different aspects appears evident from the account in chapters 12 through 14 of I Corinthians.

From the standpoint of its polyglot situation, with its myriads of commercial, marine, military, governmental, tourist, philosophical and general transient population from all over the Roman Empire and far beyond, Corinth far surpassed Ephesus, Caesarea, and even Jerusalem, where the phenomenon of "tongues" had occurred previously. Consequently there is good reason to assume that a bona fide gift of diverse languages may have occurred in the church at Corinth to meet the need for evangelizing this transient population. Thus there existed at Corinth a situation that justified and validated the miraculous gift of languages, as at Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Ephesus.

However, Paul may well have been dealing with another factor at Corinth. The evidence seems quite conclusive that in certain instances in the Corinthian situation Paul is simply giving instructions concerning transient visiting believers from other parts who knew only their own native languages which were foreign to the Corinthian Greek speaking church (see Acts 14:11). Moved by the spirit of the meeting, they would wish to worship by vocalizing their prayers, giving witness to Christ, or delivering an exhortation. Paul instructs these to worship in silence before God, unless there should be present an interpreter of their language, lest their unintelligible language seem to the Corinthian believers like heathen gibberish (bar bar), or the babblings of a madman.

A third factor, as some have pointed up, may have been a special divine gift of an understanding of the deeper insights into the Hebrew language of the Old Testament which was, for the most part at least, a dead language by that time. Thus for the Christian teachers to read, by divine enabling, the Scriptures in their archaic language would have constituted an "unknown tongue" (language) to the listeners, without an interpreter equally inspired to translate the meaning into the language of the people.

But the fourth, and final, "tongues" problem at Corinth obviously consisted in a confusion and consequent counterfeiting of the genuine miraculously bestowed gift of bona fide language, as experienced at the Jerusalem Pentecost, at Caesarea, and at Ephesus. Many in the church at Corinth had worshiped at the shrines of the lustful goddess Aphrodite Pandemos and of Cybele, in which worship trances and ecstatic experiences accompanied by unintelligible and thus meaningless utterances were common. Some in the church at Corinth may well have heard about, or even observed, the bona fide gift of languages, and then confused the phenomenon with ecstatic "unknown utterances" at the pagan shrines. Having been addicted to the latter, they carried these pagan practices into the church where they sought to display their misdirected talents in competition with those who spoke with the genuine gift of languages, in order to witness to those of foreign speech who were present in their services. It is not strange that they should have done so when it is recalled that Paul

had to deal with other pagan practices also which were brought into the church at Corinth by these former worshippers at the shrines of Aphrodite Pandemos and Cybele, including idolatrous worship, sexual immorality, gluttony, rivalry, strife, and other evil practices. Thus, these subjective, if not sometimes demonical, ecstatic experiences with which Paul dealt in his Corinthian correspondence were, in large part at least, counterfeits of the genuine, divinely given experiences of bona fide languages.

Concerning these aberrations at Corinth Mould remarks, significantly:

Paul had the good sense to try to divert this type of experience away from a mere expenditure of emotional froth into an ethical channel (the edification of others) and to bring it under the control of reason (I Cor. 14:19, 26). . . The principle of control which Paul emphasizes is the principle of love (I Cor.13).. . In Paul's thought the most genuine manifestation of the Spirit is to be observed in the Christian life of ethical integrity and altruistic service. This same principle of ethical and rational control. Paul applies to other types of ecstatic experience, as in II Cor. 12.

Thus where it was genuine at all at Corinth, the gift of tongues was the same as at Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Ephesus. Otherwise it was spurious and something to be discarded as worthless and even dangerous to the church. (36)

## **APPENDIX LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS OF THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CENTURY**

It has been questioned by some whether the linguistic situation at Pentecost, or anywhere throughout the Roman world, was such as to require the gift of languages that is suggested in Acts 2. Mould appears to support this skeptical view when he says, "One common language, Greek, was spoken everywhere." (37) However, elsewhere he seems to contradict this position when he states that Aramaic was the language which the Jews spoke, and then adds that some Jews, especially those who returned to Palestine after long residence abroad, did also use Greek. He further notes that a special synagogue was provided for these Greek-speaking Jews. Latin, he notes was the official language of the governing class, though it was not understood by the common people. He holds that biblical Hebrew was used in religious services, but it was not understood by the Jews and the Scripture lessons required translation into the vernacular Aramaic following their reading in the original Hebrew. (38)

Thus this authority, at one time stating that Greek was the common language spoken everywhere, at another time admits that four different languages were in use: namely, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, and Hebrew. Others who assume that there was but one universally spoken and understood language throughout the Roman world of the first century seem likewise unable to escape a contradiction.

Of course it is well known that the Greek was very widely spoken throughout the lands conquered by Alexander the Great and where the Greek culture was spread. However, it appears that the Greek language was, for the greater percentage at least of the non-Greek population, a sort of lingua franca. To say that the Greek language and culture had been spread as far east as the Indus River, or even beyond, down into Egypt and possibly North Africa, is one thing, but it is quite another to say that all these people were readily conversant in the Greek language. The Greek colonists planted in these various areas would naturally have been, but it does not appear likely such would have been true of the majority of the non-Greek peoples out in the empire, and beyond.

Even to say that Greek was the lingua franca of the Roman empire is not to say that all or even a majority of the non-Greek peoples were readily conversant in Greek. The author lived for many years in British Africa where English was the official language and was used largely for trade and travel purposes. However, for the most part it was necessary to speak the native language of the people directly, or through an interpreter, if one wished to communicate with them clearly and understandably on matters of importance beyond their very limited understanding of English. And, of course, in many instances a majority of them knew no English after more than half a century of British occupation. The same has been true in India, and also in French colonial possessions. This was doubly true when one wished to convey the message of the gospel to the people. Many times the author has spoken through two and even three interpreters at once in British Africa in order to communicate the message to several different linguistic representative groups present.

Certain scholars of repute, both earlier and contemporary, support this position. One such authority notes that

Greek and Latin words were current in the popular "Hebrew" of the day: and while this Syro-Chaldaic dialect was spoken by the mass of the people with the tenacious affection of old custom, Greek had long been well known among the upper classes in' the larger towns, and Latin was used in the courts of law, and in the official correspondence of the magistrates, (Italics added) (39)

The diversity of languages used even on certain occasions in Jerusalem is further indicated by the previous authorities who point out that

On a critical occasion of St. Paul's life, when he was standing on the stairs between the Temple and the fortress, he first spoke to the commander of the garrison in Greek, and then turned around and addressed his countrymen in Hebrew; while the letter of Claudius Lysias was written, and the oration of Tertullus spoken, in Latin (Acts 21:22:23:24). (40).

Josephus notes that in the Temple area on a parapet of stone where the flight of fifteen steps led from the outer up to the inner court, there were notices posted on pillars spaced at equal distances, some of which were in Greek and some in Latin forbidding any Gentile to enter the sacred enclosure of the Hebrews. (41)

Likewise John records that a superscription was placed over Christ's Cross, by order of Pilate, bearing the cause of the Saviour's condemnation, which was "written in Hebrew, and in Latin, and in Greek" (John 19:20). It has been observed that Hebrew represented the language of religion, Latin the language of government, and Greek the language of culture. It seems evident that three languages were necessary to this official publication, even in so Jewish a city as Jerusalem.

Edersheim even recognizes different dialects within the Aramaic language by the first century when he states,

The language spoken by the Jews was no longer Hebrew, but Aramaean, both in Palestine and in Babylon; in the former the Western, and in the latter the Eastern dialect. (42)

Edersheim further notes that

In fact, the common people were ignorant of pure Hebrew, which henceforth became the language of students and of the Synagogue. Even there a Methurgeman. or interpreter had to be employed to translate into the vernacular the portions of Scripture read in the public services, and the addresses delivered by the Rabbis. (43)

This fact certainly lends weight to Lightfoot's position that the tongues (languages) and interpretations at Corinth may have been, in part at least, a divine gift bringing the then little used Hebrew language of the Scriptures into the language of the people at Corinth. In fact Edersheim raises the very question of this possibility when he asks, "Could St. Paul have had this in mind when, referring to the miraculous gift of speaking in other languages, he directs that one shall always interpret(1 Cor. XIV. 27) (44)

Fisher sees the Greek as the language of the East, but the Latin as prevailing in the West. He states,

Greek at length grew to be the language of commerce, the vehicle of polite intercourse, and a common medium of communication through all the eastern portions of the empire. The Latin tongue. the language of the Roman officials and of the Roman legions, was carried wherever Roman conquests and colonies went. West of the Adriatic, especially in Italy. Gaul, Spain. and North Africa, it prevailed as the Greek prevailed elsewhere. (45)

Hurst expresses doubt that all the Jewish worshipers at Pentecost spake or understood the same language when he says,

There were Jews in the sacred city from all parts of the known world... The miraculous gift of utterance was imparted. The multitude of Jews was attracted to the place where the disciples were. Each worshipper, whatever his language (*Italics added*), understood the preaching. (46)

Jackson and Lake clearly indicate that the Greek was not as universally used and understood as some scholars assume.

In many places (*Italics added*) still farther east the Greek language was at least understood and Greek ideas were not unfamiliar . . .

Local languages and dialects long persisted among the lower classes and in the remoter districts Greek was a common medium for polite and learned society. (*Italics added*) (47)

Machen's remarks on the linguistic situation of the first century are illuminating.

The empire of Alexander, indeed, at once fell to pieces after his death in 323 B.C.; but the Kingdoms into which it was divided were, at least so far as the court and the governing classes were concerned, Greek Kingdoms (*Italics added*). The ancient languages of the various countries did indeed continue to exist, and many districts were bilingual--the original local language existing side by side with the Greek. (48)

Perhaps no one has made clearer the polyglot character of the world of the first century than the renowned contemporary scholar, Henry J. Cadbury. He calls attention to the fact that this is strongly hinted at in the case of the Ethiopian nobleman who was converted under the ministry of Philip (Acts 8:26-39). Having asserted that the nobleman most probably read from the Greek prophecy of Isaiah,

and that Philip apparently conversed freely with him without linguistic difficulty, Cadbury nevertheless admits that the situation presents a linguistic problem.

The history and language of the ancient Ethiopians are imperfectly known. In spite of the valiant efforts of Professor Griffith its inscriptions are only half understood. Whatever language a treasurer travelling from Jerusalem might read in his copy of Isaiah he did not read Greek on the pyramids of his kings and queens at home. Those are inscribed 'sometimes in hieroglyphics which appeared to imitate approximately the Egyptian hieroglyphics and sometimes in a curslye script unlike anything hitherto known.' The whole civilization indeed is unhellenic and dominantly or decayedly Egyptian (*Italics added*). (49)

Thus it would seem that even if it is admitted that the Ethiopian nobleman personally read and spoke Greek, which is logical in his position as a high government official (treasurer of Ethiopia under Candace the queen; Acts 8:27), nevertheless his unhellenized country and people may have been quite ignorant of Greek. In this event the gospel could have reached them effectively only by someone who either had a special divine gift of their language or who had learned it, or who spoke through an interpreter. In any event these people seem to have represented a linguistic situation that was probably many times multiplied throughout the ancient world of the first century, a situation that justified the miraculous gift of languages at the Jerusalem Pentecost. Cadbury (50) appears to hint at a somewhat similar linguistic problem at Damascus in Paul's day where certain Arabic words appear in Luke's account in Acts of Paul's escape from Damascus.

Again, concerning the Lycaonian speech at Lystra referred to by Luke in Acts 14:11, Cadbury asks:

Why then does Luke mention that the old native language was used by the crowd? Probably he wished to explain why Paul and Barnabas did not object to being called Gods. They did not understand what was being said; it was the action of preparing sacrifice which first made quite plain to them what the crowd was driving at--the bulls and garlands.

But in representing the Lycaonian language as breaking through, the historian's account is quite lifelike. These old dialects did survive though not much in written form . . . It (the Lycaonian language) is referred to as late as the fourth century as still spoken there. The neighbouring dialects like Cilicia and Phrygia had also their dialects and of the Phrygian language we know much more. (51)

Another most interesting and significant situation which has a direct bearing upon the language problem of the first century is found at the island of Malta where Paul was shipwrecked on his voyage to Rome. Cadbury expresses doubt concerning the identity of the natives, but he feels sure that "The chief of the island was a Roman--the Publius whose father Paul cured of fever and dysentery." (52) That the inhabitants were barbarians, a word which carries a strong linguistic suggestion, is twice specified by Luke (Acts 28:2, 4). Luke's statement concerning these islanders conversing among themselves--"they said one to another" (Acts 28:4)--when they witnessed Paul's harmless deliverance from the viper, may carry a suggestion of private consultation in their own native language which was not understood by Paul and his companions. Concerning these inhabitants of Malta Cadbury remarks, "The natives, whatever their non-Hellenic tongue, are barbarians. Their alien speech foreboded to any Greek unfriendly treatment, especially to shipwrecked strangers. Their kindness is therefore merely one of the series of providential escapes of this charmed hero" (53) (*Paul; italics added*) .

Writing of the Greek of the New Testament, A.T. Robertson says,

In all essential respects it is just the vernacular Koine of the 1st Cent. A.D., the lingua franca of the Gr-Rom empire, the legacy of Alexander the Great's conquest of the East. This world-speech was at bottom the late Attic vernacular with dialectical and provincial influences. (54)

Robertson's witness makes clear two things. First, the koine Greek was the lingua franca of the East. Webster defines lingua franca, as the term is used here, as any hybrid language used widely as a commercial tongue, such as pidgin English. The author is thoroughly conversant with pidgin English and has used it extensively in British West Africa for general travel and commercial purposes, where it is used widely as a second language by many of the tribesmen and coastal peoples. However, few, if indeed any, would hopefully attempt to converse with the Africans in pidgin English on serious matters, or proclaim the gospel to them in this tongue. In fact, in the British courts during litigations or other serious court business, interpreters were invariably employed, in preference to the use of the pidgin English--the British West African lingua franca.

Second, Robertson's witness makes clear that the koine was modified by "dialectical and provincial influences." Thus it would appear that the koine itself, though widely used as the lingua franca, at least in the East, manifested sectional variations of a sufficiently serious nature as to produce dialects within itself. This is of course not to mention such dialects, previously mentioned, as existed among certain non-Greek-speaking peoples.

In his treatment of the North Galatian theory, William Ramsay states:

We may confidently say that no other towns (except Colonia Germa) in North Galatia possessed a Greek-speaking population to which St. Paul could preach; in fact it is exceedingly doubtful if Tavium could have contained many people who were familiar with the Greek at this period. In the rest of the country it seems certain that only a few words of broken Greek were known to the population, whose familiar tongue was Celtic. According to Jerome they retained their native language as late as the fourth century. ( 55 )

From the aggregate of the foregoing witnesses to the linguistic situation in the Roman empire and its remote borders in the first Christian century certain quite definite conclusions may be drawn.

First, the Greek language and culture had widely spread and predominated especially in the East.

Second, the Latin language and culture extended over most of the West and was predominant there.

Third, the Greek was the language of culture and learning where ever it was spread, especially among the upper Greek-speaking classes, while the Latin was mainly the language of the government.

Fourth, Greek was a sort of lingua franca in the empire, but especially of the East. Many non-Greeks spoke and perhaps also read the Greek language, some with greater and others with lesser felicity.

Fifth, the Jews outside Judea were bilingual, by and large, speaking the Greek and the Aramaic, the latter in at least two different dialects, the Eastern and the Western.

Sixth, there were evidently vast numbers of barbarians, as also possibly many proselytes to Judaism (Acts 2:10), who at best had an imperfect knowledge, if indeed any knowledge, of either the Greek or Aramaic. These barbarians, and perhaps many of the proselytes and God-fearers knew and spake only

their own native dialects and languages.

Seventh, these multitudes of barbarians and proselytes who had not been assimilated to the Greek, or even Latin, culture and language could be adequately reached with the gospel message only through their native tongues.

Eighth, in the light of the foregoing factors which obtained in the first Christian century, the divine bestowal of the gift of diverse languages and dialects at Pentecost, at Caesarea, at Ephesus, and even at Corinth, in part at least, for the purpose of evangelizing the polyglot peoples, who for various reasons gravitated to these centers, is amply justified by the needs represented by them and the results of the proclamation of the gospel to them.

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- (24) *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, ed. J. R. Dummelow (New York: Macmillan Company, 1936, rep. 1951), p. 821.
- (25) Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), PP. 226--227.
- (26) For an extensive treatment of the tongues problem at Corinth, the reader is referred to the author's "Introduction" to and exposition of I Cor. 12-14 in Vol. V of the *Wesleyan Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965).
- (27) These facts are evidenced by Luke's use of the personal plural pronoun "We" in his Acts record indicating his presence with Paul at those stages of his life and missionary work. See these "We" sections in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16.
- (28) Blackwelder, *op. cit.*
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