

Is speaking in tongues in evidence in every instance of Spirit baptism in Acts?

And is every instance of tongues manifested for the same purpose?

The official Assemblies of God (1) position paper entitled "The initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit" (2) states, in relevant part:

The expression initial physical evidence of the Baptism refers to the first outward sign that the Holy Spirit has come in filling power. A study of Scripture indicates there was a physical sign by which observers knew that believers had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The evidence always occurred at the very time the believers were baptized in the Spirit and not on some future occasion. ...

In the Book of Acts there are five occasions recorded on which people were baptized in the Holy Spirit. In three of these, details are supplied. In the other two, the details are not given. ...

In cases where details are included, various phenomena are indicated, such as the sound of wind, tongues as of fire, prophecy, and speaking with other tongues. The only phenomenon which occurs each time details are given, however, is speaking with other tongues. This is indicated in the Acts 2, 10, and 19 events. When a specific phenomenon occurs every time a Biblical experience is described, the relationship of the phenomenon to the experience cannot be overlooked. ...

In the two cases where details are not given, circumstances seem to indicate that speaking with other tongues accompanied the experience of believers being filled with the Holy Spirit. (Emphasis added).

From this, two observations should be made about the traditional Pentecostal doctrine of speaking in tongues as evidence of Spirit baptism:

1. It is drawn from a generalization from scriptural examples, and is, by its own terms, universally valid if and only if "the evidence **always** occurred at the very time believers were baptized in the Spirit."
2. The evidence was given for the benefit of "observers" -- that is, it was given so that **other people** would know that the blessed one had been Spirit baptized, and presumably would now treat him or her accordingly (as in Acts 10). By implication, it was not given to convince either God or the person receiving the baptism of the reality of what had taken place.

However, there are scriptural problems with both of these observations. First, the scriptures cited in the position paper only mention tongues as being manifest on three out of the five occasions discussed, namely, in Acts 2:4, Acts 10 and Acts 19:6. Even the Assemblies' position paper must admit that speaking in tongues is not mentioned in the accounts of the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit in Acts 8 and the account of Paul receiving the Spirit in Acts 9, although it attempts to evade the issue by saying that "details are not given" in these accounts and arguing that "circumstances seem to indicate" tongues were present. (The details which are given, and the circumstances which allegedly indicate tongues were in use, are discussed on the pages on Acts 8 and Acts 9, following this one). Moreover, the argument completely ignores the fact that there were **two** different groups

who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost: 1) the hundred and twenty who received it in Acts 2:4 and spoke with other tongues and 2) the three thousand who received it on the streets of Jerusalem pursuant to Peter's promise in Acts 2:38 and who are said to have led drastically changed and empowered lives but are never said to have spoken in tongues.

Thus, the manifestation of tongues is mentioned in only half of the six instances of Spirit baptism recorded in Acts. This is enough to show that speaking in tongues really does happen, and possibly even enough to show that it may be expected to be a very common experience among people who are presently controlled by the Spirit. However, it is insufficient to show that tongues **always** accompany Spirit control, and it is insufficient to show the existence of a one-time crisis experience called the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" which is usually received in a church service and is **always** evidenced by speaking in tongues. Observations that are consistent fifty percent of the time simply don't prove a universal generalization.

Moreover, the second traditional Pentecostal observation -- that the manifestation of tongues was always given in order that external "observers" might know that the individual so manifesting had been baptized in the Spirit -- is only directly supported by two of the three remaining scriptural examples. Moreover, in these two cases, the manifestation of tongues was not given for precisely the same purpose.

Thus, in Acts 2:4, the manifestation of tongues was given as a sign to unbelievers (see I Corinthians 14:21-22). The languages given were plainly human languages, as unbelievers present at the feast from many different lands each understood what was being said in their own native languages, and marveled because they knew all the speakers were Galileans. Acts 2:6-12. The evident purpose of this display was to simultaneously gain the crowd's attention and authenticate Peter's announcement that God had now poured out his Spirit upon Israel, as he had promised. Acts 2:16-18. This, in turn, validated Peter's message that Jesus, the Messiah, whom they had killed, had risen from the dead and now called them to repent, be baptized in his name and receive the same Holy Spirit.

In Acts 10, the manifestation of tongues was evidently given as a sign to believers -- Peter and those with him, and later the other Apostles -- that believing Gentiles had been granted salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit on the same terms as believing Jews. This purpose is clearly explained in Acts 10:47, again in Acts 11:15-18 and yet a third time in Acts 15:7-11.

On the other hand, in Acts 19:6, Paul had introduced the Holy Spirit to a group of "disciples," people who obviously knew about Jesus, but who had received only the baptism of John, had never heard of the Spirit, and had not received him when they believed. (v. 1-5). When Paul laid hands on them, it is written that "the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues **and** prophesied." However, since Paul obviously believed that they would receive the Spirit if he laid his hands on them, the manifestations of tongues and prophesy probably were not for his benefit -- he knew what the result of his actions would be, and needed no evidence. Instead, the obvious purpose of the miraculous manifestations in this situation was to serve as evidence of the Spirit's work to the recipients themselves, these disciples who had never previously heard of the Spirit. Its purpose, or, at least, its main purpose, was not to prove the Spirit's presence to an external "observer."

This variety of purposes for the manifestation of tongues is what one would expect of a God who is spirit. See, John 3:2-8. God isn't a machine, and can't be reduced to operating only by formulas devised for our convenience in maintaining church organizations.

Other pages referenced above

[The purpose of the spiritual gifts](#)

[Acts 8](#), regarding the Samaritans receiving the Spirit.

[Acts 9](#), regarding Paul receiving the Spirit.

[Promised gift of the Holy Spirit](#)

[Errors involving generalizations](#), on another site, discusses the error of drawing a generalization from isolated experiences.


[God is spirit](#), on another site, discusses what it means that God is spirit.

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