

Speaking in Tongues

By Philip Mauro

The gift of tongues, which was bestowed upon men for the first time on the day of Pentecost, was a miraculous endowment which enabled those who received it to speak in languages unfamiliar to themselves, languages they had never learned. Thereby they were empowered to declare the glad tidings to those with whom they would not have been able otherwise to communicate.

The record found in Acts 2 gives a clear description of the nature of this gift. We read that there were at Jerusalem at that season devout men “out of *every nation under heaven*,” and that when the multitude came together, they were confounded, “because that every man heard them speak *in his own language*” (Acts 2:5, 6). Thus the prominent and essential characteristic of the pentecostal gift of tongues was that it enabled the disciples to address those foreigners, “every man in his own language.”

Further, it is recorded for our enlightenment that “They were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these that speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man *in our own tongue wherein we were born*; Parthians and Medes and Elamites”—sixteen countries being named—“we do hear them speak *in our tongues* the wonderful works of God” (vv. 7-11).

Thus, in this short description, it is stated three times that the pentecostal gift of tongues was a miraculous endowment whereby those who received it were able to speak to foreigners *in their own language*. When, therefore, we encounter now-a-days that which purports to be the apostolical and pentecostal gift of tongues, the first thing to be ascertained is whether its reputed possessor has the supernatural ability to speak to strangers *in their own language*. If the supposed gift does not pass *that* test, it may safely, and without further inquiry, be regarded as spurious.

The coming of the Holy Ghost was the beginning of that new and wonderful era which John the Baptist had announced (Matt. 3:11). The Lord had previously instructed His disciples that their special mission would be to preach repentance and remission of sins in His Name *among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*; but they were to wait in that city until they should be endued with power from on high (Luke 24:47-49); for the Gospel was to be preached, not with mere human power, but “with the Holy Ghost sent down

from heaven” (I Pet. 1:12). It is, therefore, a very impressive fact that the manner in which the Holy Spirit manifested His presence was by the appearance of tongues as of fire, resting upon each of the disciples, and by the bestowal upon them of the power to preach to all men who were gathered in Jerusalem to observe the feast of Pentecost, *each in his own language*. This was a most significant miracle. It proclaimed in a striking way, *first* that the great work of this era for which the Holy Ghost had come, is *the preaching of the risen Jesus of Nazareth as both Lord and Christ* (Acts 2:32-36); and *second*, that this glorious gospel was to be proclaimed to “every nation under heaven,” so that all men should hear it *in their native tongue*.

It should be noted that in Acts 2, and wherever the word “tongue” is used in this connection in the Scriptures, it means simply *a language*, just as we commonly say “the English tongue,” “the French tongue,” etc. In I Corinthians 14, where the expression “*unknown tongue*” occurs, it will be seen that the word “unknown” is printed in italics, showing that it does not occur in the original text. This supplied word has misled some. The expression means simply *a foreign language*.

This supernatural ability to address a foreigner in his own language served also the purpose (along with other miracles which abounded at that time) of *attesting this new era and this new message (the Gospel), as being from God*. Without such manifestations of the presence and power of God working in and with those obscure Galilaeans, it could not have been made evident to Jews and Gentiles that God was really introducing a new order of things. That the main purpose of miracles was to authenticate the preaching of the “great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord,” is declared in many Scriptures, as in Hebrews 2:3, 4, where we read that God also *bore witness* (with His preachers) by means of “signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and *gifts of the Holy Ghost*, according to His own will.”

That such extraordinary miracles were needed at the beginning of the new era is obvious. In this respect we have a parallel in the beginning of the era of the law, when God wrought wonderful signs and miracles in Egypt and in the wilderness. Those manifestations ceased when they had accomplished their purpose.

Tongues After Pentecost

The second time the miraculous speaking in tongues is mentioned is in connection with Peter's preaching of the Gospel to a company of Gentiles in the home of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, at Caesarea, which city was really a Roman city, though within the borders of Judea. Here again "was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost, *for they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God*" (Acts 10:45, 46). This was a convincing sign to Peter and the six Jewish converts who accompanied him, that God had indeed saved those Gentiles. Therefore, they (the Jews) did not dare "forbid water, that these should not be baptized," or refuse to receive them as brethren in Christ.

Moreover, when they of the circumcision, who were at Jerusalem, contended with Peter because of this, the apostle vindicated himself by appealing to the fact that (to quote his own words) "The Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us *at the beginning*" (Acts 11:15). Thus we have given us in the Bible a very clear and strong reason for the manifestation of the gift of tongues on this occasion; for otherwise converted Gentiles would not have been received.

It should be particularly noted that, for another occurrence of that sort, Peter had to go back *to the day of Pentecost*. The inference is plain that, in all the years between, there had been *no similar manifestation* to which Peter could appeal. It is, therefore, very far from the truth to say, or to suppose, that all who were saved in apostolic times received the power to speak in tongues. It clearly appears, on the contrary, that the bestowal of the gift of tongues was reserved for occasions of unusual importance.

At Ephesus—The third and last time the manifestation of the gift of tongues is mentioned in Acts is in chapter 19. This was outside of Palestine altogether. Paul, on coming to Ephesus, met with certain disciples who had received only so much of the truth as was connected with John's baptism. They had not received the Holy Spirit because they *had not believed on the risen Jesus Christ*. When, however, they were baptized *in the Name of the Lord Jesus*, and Paul had laid his hands upon them, then "the Holy Ghost came on them; and they *spake with tongues and prophesied*" (Acts 19:1-6). In this case, as in the two preceding, there was an evident need that the truth proclaimed by Paul should be specially authenticated by signs and miracles. Ephesus, moreover, was the place where the great temple of Diana was located, and where "curious arts" (e.g., necromancy, black art, etc.) were

practiced (v. 19). Therefore, “God wrought special (i.e., unusual) miracles by the hands of Paul” in that place (vv. 11, 12).

In none of these cases was the gift of tongues sought, nor was the Holy Spirit sought after the manner of some in the present day. The Holy Spirit simply bestowed the gift when and as He deemed it needful so to do.

The Gift of Tongues in the Church

In I Corinthians, chapters 12 and 14, we read of the gift of tongues “in the church.” It is mentioned among the things wrought by the Spirit, “dividing to every man severally *as He will*” (12:7-11). Thus the giving or not giving this (or other) gift is *entirely a matter of the Divine will*, which is exercised according to the Divine wisdom.

This gift is mentioned last in the list of gifts which “God hath set in the church” (12:28-29). And the apostle’s questions “Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues?” make it clear beyond all doubt that *some only* of the saints possessed those gifts. Indeed the questions are asked for the very purpose of enforcing the argument that, as in the human body there are many members, each with *its own special function*, to be exercised for the benefit of all, so in the church there are *different gifts and duties* assigned to the several members; yet, inasmuch as all belong to one and the same body, the gifts all pertain to that one body, regardless of what members have them. According to the inspired argument of that chapter it would be as absurd to expect every member of the church to have the gift of tongues as to expect that every member of the human body should be a tongue endowed with power to speak (v.17).

In chapter 14 Paul shows that the gift of prophecy is far more to be desired than that of tongues, because prophesying—i.e., ministering the Word of *God—edifies the church*; and this is the work of Love, because “Love edifieth” (8:1), whereas speaking in tongues may be but the vain display of a gift. Paul makes the contrast very strong, saying, “I speak with tongues more than ye all; yet in the church I had rather speak *five words* with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than *ten thousand words in an (unknown) tongue*” (14:18, 19). So the relative value is as five to ten thousand.

He then bids those Corinthians to “be not children in understanding,” and explains to them that the gift of tongues was a fulfillment of Isaiah 28:11,

12, where God, in foretelling judgments upon Israel in connection with their rejection of His Word (which had always been spoken to them *in Hebrew*) said, “For with stammering lips and *another tongue* will I speak unto *this people*” (the Jews) . Therefore, at Pentecost God began to speak to *the Jews* in “another tongue.” This was a “sign” to that *unbelieving* people. And this is precisely what Paul declares in the next verse, where he says: “Wherefore, tongues are for *a sign*, not to them that believe, but *to them that believe not*; but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but *for them which believe*” (I Cor. 14:21). Thus the gift of prophecy is incomparably greater than that of speaking in tongues. It follows that to say the gift of tongues is a sign to believers that the one so gifted who has received the Holy Spirit, is simply to turn the Scripture upside down.

The Spirit Given to Them That Believe

The Lord Jesus declared that “*they which believe on Him* should receive” the Holy Spirit (John 7:39). Peter, on the day of Pentecost, said that all who would *repent and be baptized* should “receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Again he said, speaking of the Holy Ghost, “Whom God hath given to *them that obey Him*” (Acts 5:32), that is, who obey the gospel by believing in Jesus Christ. In Galatians 3:1-3 Paul bases his entire argument on the fact that the Galatians had “received the Spirit *by the hearing of faith.*”

Never is there such a thing as a believer in Christ who had not received the Holy Spirit, or one who had received Him otherwise than through *believing the Gospel.*

As regards the strange modern idea that speaking in tongues is to be sought as the “Bible-sign” of having received the Holy Spirit we would point out that *faith* does not seek after a sign, but rests upon the simple Word of God. Paul says, “For *the Jews* require a sign”; and it was natural for them to do so; but not for those who are “justified by faith.”

The Lord Jesus said: “This is an evil generation, they *seek a sign*”; and again, “Except ye see *signs and wonders* ye will not believe” (John 4:48). The spirit of the Jews was manifested in the question, “*What sign* showest thou, that we may *see* and believe thee?” (John 6:30). These Scriptures surely do not encourage God’s saints to seek after a sign. Moreover, the Lord did not say concerning His people that “by their *signs* ye shall know them,” but

expressly “by their *fruits* ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). And again, “By this shall all men know that ye are *my* disciples, if ye have *love one to another*” (John 13:35). If those who have received the Holy Spirit are seen walking after the Spirit, manifesting the love of the Spirit, and bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit, there will be no need of any “signs” whereby they may be distinguished.

Signs Following

Appeal is frequently made to the words of Mark 16:17,18, as if they contained the promise that *all* that believe should be endowed with the gift of tongues. But the words will bear no such interpretation. They declare that certain signs, of which speaking with new tongues was one, should follow *them that believe*. The Lord no more promised that *all* believers should speak with tongues than He promised that all should cast out devils, take up serpents, and drink poison without receiving hurt. Speaking with tongues, therefore, is no more the “Bible sign” of having received the Holy Spirit than is the casting out of devils, or the taking up of serpents.

Moreover, we have only to read the 20th verse of the chapter to find the *complete fulfillment* of the promise of verses 17 and 18: “And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and *confirming the word with signs following*.”

This Scripture refutes “pentecostal” doctrine, for it speaks of “them that *believe*”; whereas, according to that doctrine, speaking in tongues is not a sign of *believing*, but of *receiving the Spirit*, which the “pentecostals” hold *is a distinct thing*.

A Dangerous Delusion

We believe that the modern error regarding tongues, as made prominent by those who call themselves “pentecostals,” is one of the most dangerous of these last days. Many true, earnest, and zealous children of God have been deluded by it. The appeal it makes is very attractive to saints who groan and sigh for something different from the shams and dead formalities of religious Christendom. We have had it under observation from the start. Its phenomena—ecstasies, transports, prostrations, yielding to “the power,” displaced personality, etc.—are the very same as we had already become

familiar with in our previous investigations of hypnotism, spiritism, and other psychic and occult phenomena. We know by personal observation some of the terrible havoc—moral and spiritual—it has wrought. Most earnestly, therefore, do we warn the beloved people of God against it.

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