

## 79. THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND OF TONGUES

Tongues were given:

1. To warn unbelieving Jews.
2. To confirm the Word with signs. Mark 16:17-20.
3. To confirm the Apostles as God's true messengers.

**I. To Warn unbelieving Jews.** "In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people (Jews); and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore, tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not...". 1Cor. 14:21,22.

Isaiah, in 712 BC (Isaiah 28:11), had in simple Hebrew warned the Jews to repent from their sinful ways. They rejected his plain message in Hebrew, and so God said that He would speak to them in the tongues of foreigners, like the Assyrians, to see if this would cause them to repent. Paul quotes this to show that the main purpose of tongues in the first century was to authenticate the new message of Christ to unbelieving Jews to get them to repent of their sins.

This is seen in the following instances:

1. The Jews who had come to Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost were from 16 areas of the ancient world each speaking his own language or dialect. They each heard the apostles speaking the wonderful works of God in their own dialects. This message convicted them of their sin of crucifying Christ, bringing 3,000 of them to true repentance (Acts 2).
2. The gift of tongues to Cornelius' household was to convince the Jewish Christians that God would save believing Gentiles. Here the Jews had believed on Christ, but disbelieved that God would save Gentiles as He had only saved Jews up until then.
3. Tongues in the church at Corinth was a sign to unbelieving Jews.
  - a) The Corinthian church was closely observed by Jews, because Paul started it in the Jewish synagogue (Acts 18:1-5).
  - b) The unbelieving Jews put Paul out of the synagogue, so Paul's missionary team went to win Gentiles (18:6), by moving the new church to Justus' house which was joined to the synagogue next door (18:7). The unbelieving Jews watched the church carefully because it met right next door.
  - c) Soon "Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all his house." (Acts 18:8).
  - d) Sosthenes was chosen as the new chief ruler of the synagogue to replace Crispus. Sosthenes was soon saved, because Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:1, "Paul.....and Sosthenes our brother." Hence, the Corinthian church was started in the synagogue, it met next door to the synagogue, and it had two ex-chief rulers of the synagogue as it's members! Certainly the unsaved Jewish community at Corinth carefully watched the Corinthian church. God gave the gift of tongues, the gift intended as a sign to unbelieving Jews, in special measure to this church thereby proving that the gospel of Christ was to be received by the Jews. Tongues were **never** given as a sign to Gentiles. The Gentiles had no dispensational hurdle of Mosaic legalism to jump over to come to Christ.
4. Tongues as a warning to Jews can be seen from Old Testament events, summarised by:

- a) God has a message for the people.
- b) The people refuse to listen to God.
- c) God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment to come.
- d) Dispersion follows.

### **Event 1: Tower of Babel.** Genesis 11.

Foreign tongues first appeared in Genesis 11:1 "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech."

1. God has a **message** for the people: After the flood, God said:

"Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth." Genesis 9:1.

2. The people **refuse to listen** to God: They built a great tower,

"...Lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

Genesis 11:4.

3. God caused **tongues** to be heard as a **sign of judgment**. God said,

"Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Genesis 11:7.

4. **Dispersion** followed, "So the Lord scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth." Genesis 11:8.

### **Event 2: Disobedient Israel.** Deuteronomy 28.

God promised Israel blessings if they obeyed God's Law, and cursings if they broke God's Law.

1. God has a **message** for the people:

"If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all His commandments.....all these blessings shall come upon thee....." Deuteronomy 28:1.

2. The people **refuse to listen** to God.

"If thou wilt not hearken.....all these curses shall come upon thee....." Deuteronomy 28:15.

3. God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment: One curse that God promised was a foreign conquering nation speaking strange tongues.

"The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far.....as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand." Deut. 28:49

4. Dispersion follows: "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people....." Deuteronomy 28:64, 65. This happened to Israel in 721 BC, Judah in 606 BC, and Israel in 70 AD.

**Event 3: Babylonian tongues heard by dishonest Judah in 612 BC. Jer. 3-5.**

1. God has a message for the people: "Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Jeremiah 3:22.
2. The people refuse to listen to God: "thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction....they have refused to return." Jeremiah 5:3.
3. God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment. If Israel would not heed Jeremiah's warnings, then God would speak to them by strange tongues and swords of an invading nation. "Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far.....a mighty nation,.....a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say." Jeremiah 5:15.
4. Dispersion follows: "As ye have forsaken Me, and served strange gods in your land, so shall ye serve strangers in a land that is not yours." Jeremiah 5:19.

**Event 4: Assyrian tongues heard by disobedient Israel in 712 BC. Isaiah 28.**

When Paul discusses the purpose of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:21 and 22, he quotes Isaiah 28:11 to show that tongues were given as a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel: ".....to them that believe not." 14:22.

Sophisticated Israelites were sick of Isaiah's rebukes that sin was rampant, judgment was coming, and a return to God was the only answer.

In Isaiah 28:9,10 they claimed that he was teaching them like newly weaned babies, "line upon line....". Your repetitious teaching is fit for infants, they said. They rejected God's message, messenger, and teaching methods. God responded to their scoffing by imitating their mockery (Isaiah 28:9,10), and promising unintelligible language of a foreign conqueror: "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this purpose." Isaiah 28:11. God first spoke to them through Isaiah's clear and simple message, which they ignored. Now God will speak in judgment to them through stammering, lisping, Assyrian lips and another tongue. The Assyrian language sounded much less cultivated (with only 3 vowels: a, i, and u) than Hebrew. They would hear the enemies harsh, foreign tongue as they invaded, killed, and captured many Israelite towns in 712-710 BC under Sennacherib. Note the same pattern:

a) God has a message for the people:

"Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of ephraim (v1).....To whom he said,.....This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest." Isaiah 28:1.12.

b) The people refuse to listen to God: "yet they would not hear." Isaiah 28:12.

c) God caused tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment: "For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people." Isaiah 28:11.

d) Dispersion follows: "that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken, (captive) Isaiah 28:13.

Note: To Israel, foreign tongues was a sign of God's judgment and curse upon them. Likewise the absence of foreign tongues was a sign that Israel was under the blessing of God. In the millenium, God promises Israel in Isaiah 33:19 that ".....thou shalt not see a fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand."

### Event 5: New Testament tongues to Israel 30-70 AD.

Israel did not learn from the tongues warnings that led to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities in 721 and 606 BC. So God again warned them with Christians speaking in tongues from 30-70 AD to warn them to repent or God would judge them. This happened by Titus the Roman general destroying Jerusalem in 70 AD.

1. God has a message for the people:

"Come unto me.....and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28.

"We do hear them speak in our tongues. (v11) Then Peter said unto them, Repent...(v39)." Acts 2:11, 38, 39.

2. The people refuse to listen to God:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." Matthew 23:37.

3. God causes tongues to be heard as a sign of judgment.

a) Christ warned Israel of soon coming judgment, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.....Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Matthew 23:38; 24:2.

b) God had caused foreign tongues to be spoken and heard as a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel in Acts 2, 10, 19; I Corinthians 12-14. When God spoke in tongues, the Jews understood the message. Tongues were a sign gift to unbelieving, Christ-rejecting Israel. "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not (Jews). I Corinthians 14:22.

4. Dispersion follows: Jesus Christ correctly foretold this in Luke 21:20-24, "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh (v.20). They shall be led away captive into all nations.....". This all happened in 70 AD when Titus the Roman general destroyed Jerusalem, killing 1 million Jews and taking 100,000 captive as slaves.

**Question:** When did tongues cease?

**Answer:** If foreign tongues were really a sign of coming judgment on Israel, then once this judgment had come ( in 70 AD), the tongues sign gift would no longer be necessary. The Biblical gift of tongues had ceased by 70 AD. The last historical mention of tongues is in 1 Corinthians written in 59 AD. Tongues served their purpose and tongues ceased as God predicted in 1 Corinthians 13:8, "....tongues shall cease."

### II. To Confirm the Word with Signs (Mark 16:17-20).

"And these signs shall follow them that believe;

sign 1. ....in my name shall **cast out devils**;

sign 2. ....they shall **speak with new tongues**;

sign 3. ....they shall **take up serpents**; and

sign 4. ....if they **drink any deadly thing**, it shall not hurt them;

sign 5. ....they shall **lay hands on the sick**, and they shall recover .

And they went forth (Apostles), and preached every where, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word with signs following. Amen."

Mark 16:17-20.

The New Testament, being a new revelation, needed to be confirmed that it was from God. This was done by miraculous signs of the Apostles, one of which was tongues. If the five signs above were fulfilled in the Apostle's lifetime, then Mark 16:17-20 is satisfactorily fulfilled. It does not say that these five signs would always happen to all believers. Verse 20 tells us that God kept His promises of verse 17 and 18. Charismatics assume that verse 17 and 18 mean that all believers will always speak in tongues and do these signs. This is wrong because:

1. I Corinthians 12:30 asks, "do all speak with tongues?". This is a rhetorical question which implies, "No."
2. II Corinthians 12:12: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." These were signs belonging to apostles, not to every believer.
3. Acts 5:12-16: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people (v.12) ....and believers were the more added to the Lord (v.14) ....insomuch that they (believers) brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.....they were healed.....every one." (v.16).

Notice here that:

- Signs and wonders were done by the apostle's hands, not by every believer. (v.12).
- Believers brought sick people to Peter to heal, because they could not heal them themselves. (v.14,16)
- Every one was healed. No one does this today.

Charismatics are wrong to claim the gift of healing for today. Since apostolic healing has ceased, so have the other four signs, tongues included.

4. Acts 4:33: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." Question: Who had great power to bear witness of the resurrection? The apostles, not every believer.

5. Hebrews 2:3-4 show that signs, wonders, miracles, and some gifts of the Holy Ghost were restricted only to the apostles (those who heard Christ), and were not available to future generations of Christians: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which:

a) at the first began to be spoken by the Lord (Christ),

b) and was confirmed unto us by them (apostles) that heard him (Christ), (v.4) ....God also bearing them (the apostles) witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will."

Notice here that:

Verse 4: God bore the apostles witness with signs, wonders, miracles and gifts. God did not bear witness to the next generation of Christians with signs, etc, only to the apostles.

Verse 3: The apostles confirmed Christ's salvation message to the next generation, because the apostles heard Christ speak. The next generation never confirmed Christ's message with signs etc.

**Question:** When did God bear the apostles witness with signs, etc.?

**Answer:** "At the first," not always.

All the Greek verbs used in Hebrews 2:3-4 are in the aorist tense, indicating a completed fact which can never be replaced.

Peter refers to this early time element of signs, miracles, tongues, etc, in Acts 11:15, where he describes the tongues speaking gift in Cornelius' household, not as a regular happening, occurring time after time since Pentecost, but as similar to the tongues gift last poured out at Pentecost. "And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning." When? "AT THE BEGINNING." Hence signs were to "follow" for a time, not accompany believers for all time.

6. Hebrews 6:5 "And have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come." These miracles of the apostles are described as "powers of the world to come", meaning Christ's millennial Kingdom, not powers of this present Church Age. Therefore, the signs, wonders, miracles, etc performed in the first century will be regular events in the millennium, but not until then.

7. Acts 19:11: "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul."

8. Acts 2:43: "Many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles."

### **III. Confirm the Apostles as God's True Messengers.**

Hebrews 2:3,4. "God also bearing them (Apostles) witness, both with signs, and wonders and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost..." Thus, tongues and other miracles and signs authenticated the apostles' authority.

God did the same for Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Christ, etc. as their miracles confirmed that they were from God (in Christ's case - was God).

Jesus Christ, when He gave His command to the apostles to "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), He knew that the apostles would have to go to the Gentiles. This would meet with much Jewish racial opposition. Hence, Christ gave them miraculous sign gifts that they would perform in order to confirm and authenticate the gospel message as being from God. This tongues gift seen at Cornelius' household was what convinced the Jewish Jerusalem Council to send the gospel to the Gentiles. Acts 11:15-18.

### **IV. Early Church Writers up to 320 AD say that Tongues Ceased in the First Century.**

A good way to check any doctrine is to see what the early Christian writers, many of whom were taught personally by the apostles, had to say about it. Their comments reveal what were the practices of the early Christian church.

There is overwhelming evidence that tongues did cease in the first century, because:

1. No mention of tongues can be found in any of Paul's later epistles, only in 1 Corinthians, one of

the earliest letters written. Romans, being a thorough doctrinal study, never mentions tongues. Ephesians 4-6 when discussing how to walk worthy, never mentions tongues. When discussing qualifications of pastors and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, Paul never mentions tongues as a necessary gift. Tongues are only mentioned in Mark 16 (33 AD), Acts 2, 10, 19 (33, 41, 54 AD respectively) and 1 Corinthians (59 AD) in a rebuking, correcting, restricting manner. He is not endorsing it, but limiting its wrong use.

2. Chrysostom, a great preacher in 347-407 AD, in discussing tongues in 1 Corinthians states: "This whole place is very obscure, but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur, but now no longer take place." [Homilies, XXIX, 1]

3. Augustine around 410 AD stated that tongues was a sign adapted only to Biblical times.

4. Clement of Rome in 96 AD wrote a letter to the church at Corinth to correct the same problems that Paul corrected. Clement mentioned every problem except tongues. Why? Because tongues had ceased.

5. Origen (185-254 AD) in all his voluminous writings gives no hint that tongues or other sign gifts were a normal occurrence in his day.

6. Others, like Ignatius of Antioch who wrote to Ephesus, Justin Martyr (100-167 AD), Irenaeus (130-195 AD) bishop of Lyons, never mention tongues. Tertullian (155-202 AD) describes it as an apostolic occurrence, not as a phenomena of his time.

7. Tertullian (155-202 AD) describes it as an apostolic occurrence, not as a phenomena of his time.

8. Montanur (150 AD) who was regarded as a heretic because his prophecies went unfulfilled, and claimed to be a successor to the apostles, spoke in tongues. Polycarp and Papias who were disciples of John spoke against Montanus as a heretic.

The table below shows that tongues in the Book of Acts only occurred when Jews were present.

**Question:** Why were there no tongues in Samaria in Acts 8? Why did Phillip not lay hands on the Samaritians to impart the Holy Ghost? Why could Peter and John do it, but not Phillip? Was Phillip a bad Christian? (No. It was a gift that only the apostles had). There were no apostles to walk the earth after the Apostle John died in 96 AD.

<p align="center"><b><u>JERUSALEM</u></b> <b><u>ACTS 2</u></b></p> <p align="center"><b>TONGUES</b> <b>JEWES</b></p> <p>3000 devout unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem needing to hear tongues as a sign of judgment.</p>	<p align="center"><b><u>SAMARIA</u></b> <b><u>ACTS 8</u></b></p> <p align="center"><b>NO</b> <b>TONGUES</b> <b><u>NO JEWES</u></b></p> <p>No Jews would live at Samaria due to racial hatred.</p>	<p align="center"><b><u>CAESAREA</u></b> <b><u>ACTS 10</u></b></p> <p align="center"><b>TONGUES</b> <b>JEWES</b></p> <p>Peter and six Jewish Christians not believing that Gentiles could be saved.</p>	<p align="center"><b><u>CORINTH</u></b> <b><u>ACTS 18</u></b></p> <p align="center"><b>TONGUES</b> <b>JEWES</b></p> <p>Many unbelieving Jews living at Corinth needing to hear tongues as a sign of judgment.</p>	<p align="center"><b><u>EPHESUS</u></b> <b><u>ACTS 19</u></b></p> <p align="center"><b>TONGUES</b> <b>JEWES</b></p> <p>Many unbelieving Jews living at Ephesus needing to hear tongues as a sign of judgment.</p>
<p>1. Apostles spoke in tongues. 2. 3000 people saved. 3. 3000 people baptised. NOTE: 3000 people did <u>not</u> speak in tongues.</p>	<p>1. Samaritans believed. 2. They were baptised. 3. Peter and John laid hands on them. 4. They received the the Holy Spirit. NOTE: Samaritans did <u>not</u> speak in tongues. NOTE: Phillip did <u>not</u> lay hands on Samaritans, because only an Apostle could impart the Holy Spirit by laying of hands.</p>	<p>1. Cornelius believed. 2. Holy Spirit fell on him 3. He <u>spoke in tongues</u>. 4. He was <u>baptised</u>. NOTE: They spoke in tongues to convince the Jewish Christians that Gentiles could be saved, and that God was no longer working only through the Jews.</p>		<p>1. John's disciples believed. 2. They were baptised 3. Paul laid hands on them. 4. The Holy Spirit came on them. 5. They <u>spoke in tongues</u>. NOTE: Tongues warned the Jewish Community at Ephesus of coming judgment. It also identified John's disciples with the Apostles and Pentecost.</p>

"Afterward" in Joel 2:28 pinpoints the time of the Spirit's outpouring in this passage. It is **after** Jesus Christ has returned at His glorious appearing, that is, His second coming. The context of Joel 2 **does not allow us** to **link** this outpouring of the Spirit to events **before** Christ returns. This refutes the thought that today's tongues are a "sign of Christ's second coming".

**Conclusion:** The gift of tongues is NOT for today.

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