

# Speaking in Tongues

by

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## A Grace Bible Church Publication

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## Introduction

Let me begin by saying that I used to speak in what people call "tongues" today. As a new Christian, I became involved in the Charismatic movement and came to believe all of the modern Charismatic teachings on tongues. But as I continued to study my Bible and other materials on the subject, I soon realized that what I was doing was not the biblical gift of tongues.

What were tongues in the Bible? What was their purpose? Is the gift of tongues still in existence today? If not, then what are those who claim to speak in tongues actually doing? In an area that is often filled with much confusion and misunderstanding, it will be the purpose of this booklet to examine what the Bible says about this subject. What is the biblical teaching on tongues?

## What Were Biblical Tongues?

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. Acts 2:4, 6.*

This passage tells us what tongues were. Tongues were languages. The following verses go on to list numerous groups whose languages were being spoken.

*Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues [languages] the wonderful works of God. Acts 2: 9-11.*

The word tongue, then, means language. This is confirmed by many other passages of scripture. For example:

*. . . I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Acts 26:14.*

*. . . and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue. Ezra 4:7.*

*. . . whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. Daniel 1:4.*

*. . . whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon. Revelation 9:11.*

Tongues, wherever you find them in the Bible, are languages. This is important to note, for those who claim to be speaking in tongues today are not speaking in actual languages.

### **Are There Two Kinds of Tongues?**

Some people will object at this point. They will say "But there are two kinds of tongues in the Bible. One is a language, but the other is an 'ecstatic utterance' (gibberish)". It is often said that the tongues in Acts chapter 2 are different from the tongues in 1 Corinthians chapter 14. But where in the Bible does it say that there were more than one type of tongues? It doesn't. This confusion is brought about by the fact that in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 the Bible says that tongues needed to be interpreted to be understood. But in Acts chapter 2, they were understood without interpretation. Does this indicate that there were two different types of tongues?

It must be pointed out that a person who spoke in tongues was supernaturally gifted by God with the ability to speak in a language that he did not know. The person speaking didn't even know what he was saying — unless, of course, God also gave him the gift of interpretation.

Then why didn't the tongues in Acts chapter 2 need to be interpreted? A careful reading of the text will reveal why.

*And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. Acts 2:4-6.*

You see, on the day of Pentecost, there were people present (in Jerusalem) from "every nation under heaven". So many languages were being spoken that each person present heard his own language being spoken, so no interpretation was needed. But this was not the case in Corinth (1 Corinthians 14). When the local Christians in Corinth gathered together and a person began to speak in a language that he did not know, the others in Corinth didn't understand the language either. It therefore needed to be interpreted. The tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 were the same as the tongues in Acts 2. Both were languages. The Bible knows nothing of two different types of tongues.

### **What was the Biblical Purpose of Tongues?**

*In the law it is written, WITH MEN OF OTHER TONGUES AND OTHER LIPS WILL I SPEAK UNTO THIS PEOPLE; 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: 1 Corinthians 14:21-22.*

This passage tells us the biblical purpose for tongues. "Tongues are for a sign". This is not for believers but for unbelievers (a sign to unbelieving Jews). Verse 21 is a reference to Isaiah chapter 28.

*For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to **this people**. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon*

*precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken. Isaiah 28:11-13.*

This passage says that God will cause people to speak to the Jews (this people) with another tongue. Yet they will not hear, but will fall backward and be broken and snared (judgment will come).

On the day of Pentecost, after the apostles spoke in tongues, a great crowd gathered to see what was going on. The Apostle Peter then spoke to this Jewish crowd. One thing he told them was:

*This Jesus hath God raised up, where-of we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear [tongues]. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, THE LORD SAID UNTO MY LORD, SIT THOU ON MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THY FOES THY FOOTSTOOL. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Acts 2:32-36.*

This same Jesus whom the Jews had crucified was now in Heaven, exalted at the right hand of God. His foes (including the Jews who had crucified him) will be made his footstool. Peter therefore warned them in verse 40 to "save yourselves from this untoward generation (from the judgment to come upon it)". The evidence (sign) that this judgment would come was that Jesus had "shed forth that which ye now see and hear (tongues)". Tongues were a sign to the Jews who had rejected and killed their Messiah, that God's judgment was going to come. More will be said about this in the next section.

### **Is the Gift of Tongues Still in Existence Today?**

*Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 1 Corinthians 13:8.*

This passage tells us that tongues were to cease (pass away). But when were they to cease? Tongues were to cease when their purpose had been fulfilled.

We made reference in the last section to the purpose for the gift of tongues. The purpose was as a sign to the unbelieving Jews who had rejected their

Messiah, that God's judgment would come. Once this judgment came, the purpose for tongues would be fulfilled and tongues would cease.

When did this happen? Again, let us look to the new Testament.

*But when the king [God] heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. [Jerusalem] Matthew 22:7.*

*And when he was come near, he beheld the city, [Jerusalem] and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation [Rejected your Messiah]. Luke 19:41-44.*

*And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Luke 21:20, 22, 24.*

All of these passages refer to 70 AD The Jews rejected and killed their Messiah, and God sent judgment in 70 AD by allowing the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem.

Tongues were for a sign to unbelieving Jews that these things would come to pass. Once this judgment came, the purpose for tongues was fulfilled and tongues ceased. This is consistent with the writings of the Early Church, for after 70 AD, no one was any longer said to have been speaking in tongues.

### **What About Today's "Tongues"?**

If biblical tongues were languages, but today's "tongues" are not languages, and if biblical tongues ceased in 70 AD but people still claim to be speaking in tongues today, what is going on?

**There are two explanations for modern tongues.**

## **A Supernatural Explanation**

Although biblical tongues were always languages, there is obviously another type of "tongues" present in the world today, but it is far from biblical. This type of "tongues" is an "ecstatic utterance" (gibberish). But where is it found? It is found, not only among Charismatics, but also among those in false religions. Ecstatic speech is common today among Muslims, Eskimos, Tibetan Monks (Buddhists), and even among those in the occult.

One can't help but notice the obvious ramifications of this. If these "tongues" are the biblical gift of tongues, is God also giving this gift to those in pagan religions, cults, and the occult? No. Jesus Christ only gives spiritual gifts to those within the Christian Church. (Ephesians 4:8,11; 1 Corinthians 12:28). Therefore, since these "tongues" also exist outside of the Christian Church, they cannot be the biblical gift of tongues. It seems that the same spirit that is misleading those in false religions is also misleading those within the Christian Church. (1 Corinthians 10:20; 1 Timothy 4:1)

## **A Natural Explanation**

As I stated in the introduction, I used to speak in what people call "tongues" today. At first I desired to speak with tongues and prayed to God that he would enable me to do so. But nothing happened. I read about the people in the Bible who spoke in tongues, and with them it just happened. In most cases, they had no idea that they were going to speak in tongues until *after* it had already happened.

I finally came across a booklet written by a popular Charismatic teacher which taught me how to speak in "tongues" (so called). That is exactly what the booklet did — these tongues were not a supernatural gift from God. It was something that could be learned. I was coached to begin speaking nonsensical syllables and let my tongue go. The booklet said that God would take over and control what I spoke. I think that I was aware all along that I was the one doing it — not God — but I had been conditioned to believe that I needed to do this in order to be "spiritual". Now looking back, I see how unscriptural all of this was. No one in the Bible was ever coached or taught how to speak in tongues. As I said before, it just happened to them. They did not expect, tarry, or do anything.

## **Biblical Restrictions on Tongues**

Even the use of *true* biblical tongues was restricted in the Bible.

*If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course [one at a time]; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church . . .* 1 Corinthians 14:27-28.

This passage gives the following restrictions for the use of tongues in the church:

1. No more than three may speak.
2. Only one at a time (by course).
3. Tongues must be interpreted or not spoken at all.

Every one of these restrictions is broken on a regular basis in many Charismatic churches. In the one I used to go to, people (more than three) would stand in a circle at the front of the church building before church began. They would all speak in "tongues" (gibberish) at the same time (not one at a time) and in most cases nothing was interpreted. This was clearly a violation of all three of the above restrictions.

Paul foresaw this kind of chaos.

*If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?* 1 Corinthians 14:23.

What is the priority of speaking in known languages as opposed to speaking in tongues?

*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.* 1 Corinthians 14:19.

## **Misunderstood Verses**

There are many verses that are misinterpreted by teachers within the Charismatic Movement today. In this section we will look at a few of them.

### **Praying in the Spirit**

*But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,* Jude 1:20.

The common Charismatic interpretation of this verse says that praying in the Holy Ghost (praying in the Spirit) refers to speaking in tongues. Well the Bible also tells us to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). If to "pray in the Spirit" means to pray in tongues, then to "walk in the spirit" must mean, to walk in tongues?

How silly. To walk in the Spirit means to walk "according to" the Spirit's leading. To pray in the Spirit then, means to pray "according to the Spirit's leading". The Holy Spirit will prompt us to pray for certain things. When we follow that prompting, we are praying "in the Spirit". This verse has nothing to do with speaking (or praying) in tongues.

### **Tongues of Angels**

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. 1 Corinthians 13:1.*

The common Charismatic interpretation of this verse says that tongues is a heavenly prayer language spoken by angels.

We need to make a distinction between the word "tongue" and the word "tongues". When the word tongue (singular) is used, it is a reference to a single language. When the word tongues (plural) is used, it refers to more than one language. So, we must remember to define our terms properly according to the Bible.

Tongue = one language.

Tongues = more than one language.

To say that, "Tongues is a heavenly prayer language." doesn't make sense. To use proper English, we would have to say, "Tongues are heavenly prayer languages." But no one says that tongues are prayer languages (plural). They (misunder-standing the terms) use the word tongues as if it were the same as the word tongue. This results in a twisting of scripture.

This passage says "tongues" (plural), not "tongue" (singular). It says "tongues of men and of angels". There are tongues (plural) of men and there are tongues (plural) of angels. This passage does not say that angels speak in "a tongue" (one language). It says that angels speak in "tongues" (more than one language). This passage, then, does not say that angels speak in a heavenly language.



What, then, is this passage saying? It says that if I were able to speak with all the tongues (languages) that a man might be able to speak with (some men know over a dozen) and even with all the tongues (languages) that angels are able to speak with (they undoubtedly know thousands) but if I do not have charity (love), I am just making a lot of noise. This verse is making the point that love is far more important than speaking in tongues (languages).

### **No Man Understandeth**

*For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. 1 Corinthians 14:2.*

*For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. 1 Corinthians 14:14.*

The common Charismatic interpretation of these verses says that speaking in tongues is a private prayer language. It is further stated that the tongues spoken of here could not be languages, for no man was able to understand them.

What a twisting of the texts. Paul is not saying that tongues is a private prayer language that cannot be understood. Paul is pointing out the futility of speaking in a language that is UNKNOWN to the hearers.

The context of this passage has to do with edification. If someone is speaking in a language that is UNKNOWN to the hearers, how is that edifying? That person is left speaking to the only one who can understand — God. This is why Paul forbade speaking in tongues without an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:28).

### **Groanings which cannot be uttered**

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Romans 8:26.*

The common Charismatic interpretation of this verse says that since we often don't know what to pray for, we should speak in tongues and the Holy Spirit will pray through us the very thing that needs to be prayed.

Is that what this verse is talking about? No it is not. This passage says that the Holy Spirit will pray FOR us not "through" us. It further states that what is prayed are "Groanings which cannot be uttered (spoken). Since tongues are

uttered they cannot be what this verse is referring to.

What then is this verse saying? Exactly what it says. Since we do not always know what to pray, the Holy Spirit prays FOR us. His groanings cannot be uttered.

### **Edifieth Himself**

*He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. 1 Corinthians 14:4.*

The common Charismatic interpretation of this verse says that tongues is a private prayer language which strengthens and edifies the believer.

It is interesting to note that 1 Corinthians chapter 14 was written to rebuke the Corinthians for their misuse of the gifts, especially tongues. The Corinthians were each trying to take center stage and show themselves as the most spiritual. Paul rebukes them for this and tells them that this is not edifying for others in the church (1 Cor. 14:12, 26).

By trying to flaunt their gifts, the Corinthians were "edifying" themselves. This verse is not a commendation it is a rebuke.

### **Summary**

Many people claim to speak in tongues today, but these "tongues" have nothing to do with the biblical gift of tongues.

- 1.** Biblical tongues were languages — modern tongues are not.
- 2.** Biblical tongues were a sign to unbelieving Jews — modern tongues are not.
- 3.** Biblical tongues ceased in 70 AD — the modern tongues movement did not begin until 1900.
- 4.** Biblical tongues were a supernatural gift that came upon people unexpectedly — modern tongues are often a learned behavior. Even unbelievers can learn to do it.
- 5.** Biblical tongues were found only within the Christian church — modern tongues are also found in pagan religions, cults, and the occult.

What will you believe? Will you believe what the Bible says about tongues?

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## **Our Vision**

There are many false doctrines being taught today, both inside and outside of the Christian Church. We at Grace Bible Church have a great desire to see that these false teachings are exposed and refuted by the Word of God. It is our desire to produce materials that may be placed (free of charge) in the hands of God's people — to enable them to share the truth with those who have been misled by false doctrine.

Would you like to have a part in this ministry and help us get this message out to others? If so, you may make as many copies of this material as you need to give to those who have been misled by the false teaching exposed here. If you would like information on other subjects, write or email to the address listed at the beginning.

**May God bless you as you do His work.**