

What About Tongues?

The Bible speaks of a miraculous gift that was given to certain people enabling them to speak fluently in foreign languages that they themselves did not understand.

- *What was the purpose of this gift?*
- *When did it begin?*
- *How was it regulated?*
- *Was it ever terminated?*
- *What about tongues today?*
- *What about those who speak in tongues?*

THE PURPOSE OF TONGUES

From reading the Old Testament, we learn that God chose a man named Abram to father the Jewish race. Later he chose Moses to lead the Jewish nation. Then God gave them the Mosaic Law, the scriptures, and the responsibility to evangelize the world with the terrific news that God's Son would come to earth as perfect man, and therefore, become the uniquely qualified one to atone for the sins of mankind.

Indeed, Jesus Christ came from the royal line of King David, and he completely took care of man's sin problem when he died on the cross. Anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ for salvation receives "rest" from trying to work his own way to heaven.

Matthew 11:28 - Come unto Me all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

The prophet Isaiah had instructed the Jews about their responsibility to give this good news to an unbelieving world.

Isaiah 28:12 - He [God], who said to them [Jews], 'Here is rest [the gospel], give rest to the weary' [unbelievers], and 'Here is repose,' but they would not listen.

"Give rest to the weary" was a command given to the Jews to witness to unbelievers about the coming Messiah. But many were drunkards, cared nothing about God's Word, and failed miserably to carry out this commission to evangelize the lost and dying world, **Isaiah 28:7-8**.

God used the prophet Isaiah to warn them that if they continued in their disobedience and irresponsibility, God would take this great honor and privilege of representing Him away from them and give it to the Gentiles. Also, as part of their divine discipline, they would be destroyed as a nation and be dispersed throughout the world. The sign that their discipline was about to commence would be that the Jews themselves would have the gospel presented to them in Gentile languages.

Isaiah 28:11 - Indeed, He [God] will speak [the gospel] to this people [Jews] through stammering lips and a foreign tongue [Gentile languages].

Gentile languages had a staccato type, stammering sound, while the Jews spoke smooth-flowing, classical Hebrew. So, when they heard the gospel presented to them or to fellow Jews in Gentile languages, alarms should have gone off in their heads that this was the sign of the impending judgment prophesied by Isaiah.

1 Corinthians 14:21 - In the Law [the Old Testament, Isaiah 28:11], ***it is written, 'By men of strange tongues*** [Gentile languages] ***and by the lips of strangers, I will speak to this people*** [Jews], ***and even so*** [even though the sign was evident] ***they will not listen to Me, says the Lord.'***

Why is ***Isaiah 28:11*** repeated ***1 Corinthians 14:21***? Because God was making it abundantly clear to the first century Jews that judgment was near and that He was using Church Age believers with the spiritual gift of tongues to deliver the warning sign. **Therefore, the purpose and benefit of tongues was for Israel, not for the Church!**

WHEN TONGUES BEGAN

Fifty days after the resurrection of Christ, Isaiah's prophecy became a reality.

Acts 2:4 - And they [Church Age believers] ***were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues*** [foreign languages], ***as the Spirit was giving them utterance.***

At that time, Jews were living all over the known world and many had forgotten their native tongue. But they faithfully re-gathered in Jerusalem each year to observe the annual holy day called Pentecost. The Holy Spirit enabled the Jews living there who believed in Jesus Christ to give the gospel to these visiting Jews in their Gentile languages that, of course, the Jerusalem Jews did not understand themselves.

All should have recognized this as the sign prophesied by Isaiah. If they had, they would have benefited in two ways:

- 1) They might have believed the gospel and accepted God's gift of salvation by believing in Jesus Christ, their Savior and Messiah,
- 2) They could have saved their nation from divine judgment.

Unfortunately, they ignored the warning sign, rejected the gospel, and less than forty years later, A.D.70, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. The Temple was demolished, and the Jews were massacred or dispersed. They remained that way for 1,878 years until May of 1948 when, at long last, Israel became a nation again.

The spiritual gift of tongues had been operational from the day of Pentecost up until Titus and his Roman legions destroyed Israel, and then tongues came to an abrupt end. It had served its purpose. God's grace always precedes His judgment. God gave Israel plenty of time to heed His warning, but they arrogantly ignored it.

REGULATION OF TONGUES

The apostle Paul gave instructions as to how to regulate the use of tongues. Things were getting out of hand in the churches because several people with the gift would talk at the same time. There was much confusion and disorder.

He commanded them to use tongues only when there was another person there with the gift of interpretation to translate what was being said. No more than three people were allowed to speak, and then, only one of them was permitted to speak at a time, **I Corinthians 14:26-28**.

While the one who spoke in tongues did not understand what he himself was saying, it must be stressed that it was not some kind of gibberish. The Greek word for “**tongues**” is “glossa” which refers to a language. Never does it refer to some kind of mysterious, unknown communication that only God and no one else would understand.

The King James version links the word “*unknown*” to the word “**tongue**”, but it is in italics to show that it was not in the original text. “*Unknown tongue*” causes some people to think that what was said could not be understood by any man. But this certainly was not the case.

WHEN TONGUES ENDED

The Bible itself tells us that the spiritual gift of tongues would end along with other temporary spiritual gifts.

I Corinthians 13:8-9 - *Love never fails, but where there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away with; where there are tongues, they will cease; where there is knowledge, it will be done away with. For we know in part and we prophecy in part;...*

This is a partial list of the temporary spiritual gifts that would come to an end. The question is, when exactly would these temporary spiritual gifts come to an end?

I Corinthians 13:10 - *But when the perfect [completed New Testament] comes, the partial [temporary, spiritual gifts] will be done away.*

Some teach that the word “**perfect**” is referring to Jesus Christ, and therefore, they think that none of the spiritual gifts will be terminated until He returns again. However, this is not possible because the Greek word for “**perfect**” is teleion (τελειον) which refers to something that has been completed or finished.

It is written in the nominative, **NEUTER SINGULAR**, and since it is in the neuter gender, **it must refer to a thing**, not to a person. Therefore, it cannot possibly refer to Jesus or to any other person.

“**The perfect thing**” referred to here is the completed canon of the New Testament that was finalized circa A.D. 96. The temporary spiritual gifts greatly helped the first century believers to function until the New Testament was completely finished.

Notice in **I Corinthians 14:8-9** that prophecy and knowledge will be done away with, but tongues shall cease. There is a significant difference in the Greek concerning the way these spiritual gifts would come to an end.

The Greek word used for “**will cease**” is in the **MIDDLE VOICE** meaning that the use of tongues worked to bring about its own termination which occurred in A.D.70 when the nation of Israel was destroyed. Whereas the Greek word used for “**will be done away with**” is in the **PASSIVE VOICE** meaning that the spiritual gifts of prophecy and knowledge would terminate due to an outside influence. And that outside influence would be the completion of the New Testament in A.D.96

The entire fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians points out the superiority of the gift of prophecy over the gift of tongues. The apostle Paul explained the difference between them.

I Cor. 14:22 - So then tongues are for a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not unbelievers.

Tongues were the sign that reminded the unbelieving Jews of Isaiah’s warning - ignore God and reap the consequences. However, the spiritual gift of prophecy was for believers, be they Jew or Gentile. Prophecy was far superior to tongues because it was communicated in the language familiar to everyone, and therefore, everyone benefited from it.

TONGUES TODAY

Most people who speak in tongues today admit that one form of tongues may have ended, but they claim that there remains a special prayer language one can use when communicating with God, composed of words and sounds not understood by man. They base their thinking on the following verse:

I Cor. 14:2 - For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.

“**For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men**” can be confusing. It must be remembered that tongues were not directed to everyone but only to the unbelieving Jews visiting Jerusalem who no longer understood Hebrew.

Jerusalem Jews spoke only Hebrew, so they were not benefited by the use of tongues since they could not understand a thing being said. Therefore, the one who spoke in tongues did not speak to all men, but only to the visiting Jews who understood the foreign tongue.

“**But to God**” translated from the Greek literally says, “**but speaks God.**” It is in the **DATIVE CASE OF ADVANTAGE** which means that what was being said was for God’s glory or for His advantage.

Those who spoke in tongues were not speaking to God, but for God, on His behalf and for His glory. God was glorified when an unbelieving Jew was saved through the use of tongues !

“**For no one understands...**” No one who spoke only Hebrew could understand the foreign languages spoken through the gift of tongues.

“**But in his spirit...**” Those who could speak in tongues were able to do so because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit who actually accomplished this miracle, **I Cor. 12:10-11.** (See the booklet “Can You Tell” for a detailed description of the Filling of the Holy Spirit.)

“**He speaks mysteries...**” The things being said were a mystery to everyone except the ones who had the spiritual gift of interpreting tongues and the foreigners being addressed.

So **1 Cor. 14:2** can best be understood as follows:

For the one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men in general, [but to unbelieving Jews visiting Jerusalem], but for God, [on His behalf and for His glory]; since no one understands [except the unbelieving Jewish visitors who spoke Gentile languages]. So being filled with the Holy Spirit, he [the one with the gift of tongues] spoke mysteries [to Jerusalem Jews because they did not understand the language being spoken].

EXPERIENCE IS NO PROOF

Some people insist that the gift of tongues is still in use today because they have heard others speak in tongues or have done so themselves. **It must be remembered that when one's personal experience contradicts the Bible, the Word of God must always take precedence.**

Those who have spoken in tongues must realize that just because something is real does not necessarily mean that it is of God. Such things can be brought about by emotional stimulation, demon influence, or demon possession.

Experience does not define the Word of God; the Word of God defines experience. Therefore, it can only be concluded that modern-day forms of tongues are not of God but are counterfeits of the original gift which was terminated in A.D. 70.

We are what we think, **Proverbs 23:7**. Thought is impossible without using words that we understand. When we pray to God the Father and are unable to adequately express what is in our souls, we do not have to rely on an unintelligible prayer language because the Holy Spirit takes up the slack by interceding for us.

Rom 8:26-27 - In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

It is ludicrous to think that one can communicate with God by using some kind of mysterious gibberish much like the occult uses. Satan, the great counterfeiter, uses tongues today to obscure the gospel and to cause unbelievers to think that the Christian way of life is rooted in a mindless emotionalism.

Many evangelists offer anointings, Holy Ghost babble, and miraculous healings in order to lure unbelievers to their meetings. They focus on the scintillating and the spectacular rather than the gospel. Loud music, disorder, and displays of raw emotions confuse unbelievers who leave on a sensational high but are still spiritually dead.

This type of activity is displeasing to the Lord as demonstrated by the following verses:

1 Cor 14:33 - For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

1 Cor 14:40 - But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.

Satan promotes the use of tongues among Christians to distract them from the academic study of God's Word by disrupting assemblies. Tongues help to breed arrogant competition, strife, and

ultimately, subvert the believer's spiritual growth.

Many churches are replacing true Church Age doctrines pertaining to the ministries of God the Holy Spirit with emotional stimulation and ecstatic experiences like tongues. We should emulate the Bereans of **Acts 17:11** by not allowing our experiences and feelings to lead us astray and by daily searching the scriptures for truth.

I Tim. 6:20 - ...keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings...