

PNEUMATOLOGY (119)

God has His purposes for sickness, but the need for the gift of healing is no longer operative.

Gift #8 - The gift of tongues.

Of all the gifts of the Spirit, perhaps none are more misunderstood or misinterpreted as this gift of tongues. Therefore, we will invest much time in carefully studying this gift. We will analyze this in question and answer form.

(Question #1) - How is the word “tongues” used in the New Testament?

The sad reality about a view of tongues is that most have never carefully studied the Bible to form their concept or position. Many of the books in my library which are written to defend a position do not even ask this question. It is a sad commentary on scholarship.

The word “tongues” is the Greek word “glossa” (γλῶσσα). This word is used, according to Moulton and Geden, some 50 times in the N.T. Of these 50 uses, 24 times this word is used by the Apostle Paul. In fact, in the context of I Corinthians 12-14, the word “tongues” is used 21 times: 12:10 (twice), 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:2, 4, 5 (twice), 6, 9, 13, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 29, 39. Paul’s other uses include twice in Romans (3:13; 14:11), and once in Philippians (2:11).

The other 26 N.T. uses are: 1) Three times in Mark (7:33, 35; 16:17); 2) Two times in Luke (1:64; 16:24); 3) Six times in Acts (2:3, 4, 11, 26; 10:46; 19:6); 4) Five times in James (1:26; 3:5, 6 (twice), 8; 5) One time in I Peter (3:10); 6) Eight times in Revelation (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 16:10; 17:15) (W. F. Moulton & A. S. Geden, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*, pp. 172-173).

If we analyze all of these passages, we will accurately and honestly conclude that the word “tongues” is used in at least four different ways:

- 1) It is used to refer to the physical organ, the tongue, which is located in the mouth.
Mark 7:33, 35; Luke 16:24; Rev. 16:10
- 2) It is used to refer to a tongue- shaped object. Acts 2:3
- 3) It is used to refer to the content of one’s speech. Rom. 3:13; 14:11; I Cor. 14:9; Phil. 2:11; James 1:26; 3:5, 6, 8; I Pet. 3:10; I John 3:18
- 4) It is used to refer to the nationality of one’s language. Acts 2:11; Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15

Now the particular use of the word that is pertinent to this study of the gift of tongues is tongues as a language. It is obvious that the gift of tongues was a gift to be able to speak in some other language.

There is no evidence or indication that there is any difference between the tongues of Acts 2 and the tongues of I Corinthians 12-14. In fact, those who claim to have “the gift of tongues” today often refer to it as the “Pentecostal Experience.”

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Don W. Hollis, in his book, *Tongues, Healing and You* writes: “This spiritual speaking termed by theologians ‘glossolalia’ goes back to the day of Pentecost when, according to Acts 2:4, the early Christians began to speak with other tongues when they were filled with the Holy Ghost” (p. 9). There is no question that those who claim to have the gift of tongues relate their gift to Acts 2 .

If we look carefully at Acts 2 and examine the context, we may clearly see that the word “tongue” is used to refer to an actual human language (Acts 2:6, 8, 11). In fact, the word translated “language” in Acts 2:8 is the Greek word from which we get our English word “dialect,” a word that describes not only the actual language of a particular nation, but the actual dialect of a particular country or district (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 109).

By the word use, we may conclude that to speak in a tongue was to speak in an actual human language that could be clearly understood by those who spoke that particular language.

(Question #2) - What type of language was biblical tongues?

Another way to understand this question is—was the gift of tongues a real human language spoken on earth or was it an ecstatic language of heaven? If we examine all biblical data, do we conclude that tongues was some ecstatic, trance-like utterance of rapid gibberish, or was it the careful communication of a known human language? This is a very important question to ask and answer because here is where one of the major charismatic controversies exists.

Steve Clark, who studied history at Yale and philosophy at Notre Dame, who has written a pro-charismatic book entitled *Baptized in the Spirit*, says the reason why tongues is so important is because the Holy Spirit can overcome inhibitions and bypass the mind. He says that the more common type of “gift of tongues” is the one that does not communicate in a language that anyone can understand. His thesis is that tongues, for the most part, is a gift that bypasses the mind and speaks in an unintelligible language (Steve Clark, *Baptized in the Spirit*, p. 38, pp. 126-127).

Now of course the question is does this view actually line up with the Bible? Was biblical tongues an ecstatic, trance-like utterance of rapid gibberish in which the Holy Spirit bypassed the mind and put one into some trance? Or was the gift a supernatural ability to carefully communicate God’s truth in an actual human language? What does the Bible say?

Those who hold to the view that the gift of tongues is ecstatic, trance-like babbling offer four basic evidences for their position:

(Evidence #1) - The proof of the word “unknown” which shows up in some translations.
I Cor. 14:2, 4, 13, 14, 19

The King James Version adds the word “unknown” before the word tongue in each of the above references. Many Charismatics appeal to this point and say they are speaking in an ecstatic language no one knows. Unfortunately, two critical facts are overlooked:

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- 1) The word “unknown” **is not** in the original text and is in italics in the English translations to show that very point.
- 2) The translators added the word with actual human languages in mind. The “unknown” refers to a foreign language which was not previously known to the speaker.

(Evidence #2) - The proof of a language of angels which shows up in I Cor. 13:1.

Some believe that tongues is ecstatic gibberish and defend their position by suggesting that they are speaking in a language which only angels understand, not humans. In other words, they are speaking in an angelic language, not a human one. Again, unfortunately those who hold this view overlook two critical facts:

- 1) Whenever angels spoke, they **always** spoke in an understandable human language so men could understand: Gen. 19:1, 12-14; Luke 1:26-38. In fact, in Rev. 5:11 we get a glimpse of an angelic praise service in heaven, which is attended by “myriads” of angels and the language is very clear and understandable (5:12). Furthermore, when John was in heaven visiting with an angel, he was able to write down everything in clear understandable language (Rev. 22:8-10). According to the biblical record, the language of angels was a clear communication in an understandable language.
- 2) Paul’s point was not to elevate language, but to elevate love. One who appeals to this verse in an attempt to prove Paul wanted to promote some ecstatic type of gibberish is completely misinterpreting the verse and the context. Paul’s point is if one could communicate in any language and didn’t have a proper type of love, it was useless.

Angelic language in all of Scripture is language that is understandable and clear. So this argument proves nothing.

(Evidence #3) - The proof of private prayer which shows up in I Cor. 14:4, 28.

These two verses are often cited as evidence that tongues is supposed to be some ecstatic language spoken to God. But upon close examination of the context, we will discover that Paul is **rebuking and correcting** this church for their improper perspective of tongues.

In I Corinthians 14:4, Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for edifying themselves. In other words, it didn't matter to most Corinthians what was right or wrong, if the tongues experience made one’s own self feel good or better, he did it. Paul is rebuking them for this view by saying that is not the purpose of the gift. The purpose is to use it to build up others in the church (14:12).

In I Corinthians 14:28, Paul is telling the tongues speaker to keep his mouth shut if there is no one present who can translate the language. In fact, this verse proves that tongues was an actual human language that was supposed to be translated and interpreted.

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(Evidence #4) - The proof of Spirit prayer which shows up in Romans 8:26.

The prayer described in this verse is oft times equated with some out-of-mind tongues experience. However, upon close examination of the context, one discovers that clearly the Holy Spirit's intercessory prayer ministry is not anything that even comes out of our mouths.

What Paul is saying is that when a believer reaches a point in which he no longer knows how to pray, the Spirit of God takes over and prays in our behalf in ways and with words that we cannot even speak. In other words, nothing is coming out of our mouths at all and the Spirit is carrying on this ministry in our behalf. For example, some vehicles have a four-wheel drive system that automatically kicks in. You don't have to do a thing and, in some instances, don't even know what is happening or when it is happening. So it is with this prayer ministry of the Spirit of God. There are times when we do not know what to say. There are times when we do not know what is happening or why. At those moments, the Spirit of God intercedes on our behalf praying in accordance with the will of God.

(Question #3) - What are the biblical proofs that tongues was a normal, human language?

Proof #1 - The normal use of the word refers to a normal human language.

As we have already observed, the word "glossa" (tongues), when referring to a language, normally refers to an actual human nationality and language. Never are we right to think that biblical tongues was an out of mind explosion of rapid gibberish.

Proof #2 - The gift of interpretation is the gift of translation. I Cor. 12:10; 14:27

Paul says that "tongues" needed an interpreter and interpreters are needed to translate from one language to another. Dr. Harold Hoehner, a professor of Dallas Theological Seminary, writes: "Paul states that tongues need to be interpreted (hermeneia). This word has the primary sense of translation and suggests that there is to be a translation of a foreign language." One does not interpret gibberish, but one does interpret languages.

Proof #3 - Paul's quote in I Corinthians 14:21-22 is a quote from Isaiah 28:11-12, which was an actual language.

In this quote, Paul is using an O.T. text to make a point about N.T. tongues. In examining Isaiah, we discover that "strange tongues" is a reference to the foreign language of the Assyrians who would dominate Israel as a judgment of God (Isaiah 28:1-2). Tongues became a sign that Israel had been judged by God and conquered by another power who spoke a different language than Hebrew.

Proof #4 - Tongues in Acts 2 were clearly a normal human language.

Tongues, in the Bible, was an ability to speak in a real, human foreign language.

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(Question #4) - What is a biblical definition of the gift of tongues?

Based on the biblical data, we define tongues as **a supernatural ability given by God to an individual whereby the individual could communicate a message of God in a normal, human, actual language which was not previously known or learned by the speaker.**

Biblical tongues was the ability to communicate God's truth in a foreign language without previously learning or studying that foreign language. The gift of interpretation was a supernatural ability given by God to an individual which enabled one to hear, understand and act as a translator so the message of God could be understood by the hearer who did not speak the language being spoken. Biblical interpretation was the translation of truth into the known language.

(Question #5) - What were the biblical purposes for the gift of tongues?

Purpose #1 - The gift of tongues was a spiritual gift. I Cor. 12:10, 30-31

(Fact #1) - As a spiritual gift, it was sovereignly given by God. I Cor. 12:11, 18, 29

Every major passage that deals with the subject of spiritual gifts clearly establishes that God is the One who sovereignly determines who receives a particular gift—Rom. 12:3; I Cor. 12:11, 18, 28; Eph. 4:7; I Pet. 4:11. What this means is that the gift of tongues, like all other gifts, **does not** come as a result of begging, pleading or praying. This gift **is not** imparted to someone by someone else. When the gift of tongues was operative, it came directly from the sovereign will of God and its potential came at the moment of salvation (I Cor. 12:13).

When we compare what the Bible says to what the tongues speakers claim, we discover there is a major discrepancy. Don Basham is a modern day leader of the tongues movement and he has given instructions as to how to speak in tongues:

“Now the first thing I want to tell you is this: You can sit back and relax, for you can receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit and you can speak in tongues. It is in your power to do all you have to do. ... There is no reason why every one of you...will not receive the Holy Spirit and be praising God in a new and unknown tongue within a very few minutes. So relax and be confident. It will happen. ... Again, let me make it clear; every one of you can do this. It is within your power, once you understand what is required of you to receive the Holy Spirit and to speak in tongues. Now when the prayer for you to receive is offered (and I'm simply going to pray one single prayer aloud in behalf of all of you, asking the Lord Jesus to baptize you in the Holy Spirit and to enable you to praise Him in a new, supernatural way), immediately after the ending of the prayer, I will ask you to do a very simple thing. I will ask you to open your mouth and breathe in or drink in a deep, full breath of air.... All right, that's the first step; 'breathing in' the Holy Spirit and having faith that He's coming in. ... Again, let me tell you, relax! You can do this. You can receive the evidence of speaking in tongues. It is in your power to do it. Let me explain what I mean. ... So when the time comes for you to speak in tongues be ready!