

## Speaking in Tongues

This study will cover the following topics related to speaking in tongues, using the Bible as the basis for the subject matter.

- What Are Tongues?
- Tongues and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost
- The Gift of Tongues
- Is the Baptism of the Holy Ghost With Tongues for Today?
- Other Operations of Tongues

### What Are Tongues?

When the Bible refers to speaking in tongues, it is referring to an experience whereby a person speaks in a language that is unknown to them by the power of the Holy Ghost (Spirit). There is more than one operation of tongues by the Holy Spirit which will be discussed in this study. The two primary areas of the New Testament which mention tongues are the Book of Acts and I Corinthians Chapters 12-14. The Book of Acts deals with speaking in tongues as a sign of receiving the Holy Ghost. I Corinthians deals with other operations of tongues such as the gift of tongues, praying in tongues, and singing in tongues in relation to a church service. It is important to note that the Book of Acts is the only book which gives actual New Testament accounts of people being saved in the church age while I Corinthians was written to people that were already saved.

When people receive the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, they will speak in tongues. An example of this is recorded at the birth of the New Testament church in Acts Chapter 2 and also in other passages in the Book of Acts.

*“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:4)*

Notice the Bible states that the disciples in the upper room spoke with “other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”. In other words, the language that the disciples spoke was determined by which language the Holy Ghost chose for that person. So speaking in tongues is speaking in a language unknown to the speaker and is caused by the power of the Holy Ghost filling that person. Speaking in tongues is a sign that a person has received (been filled) with the Holy Ghost.

### Tongues and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost

When we study the different occasions recorded in the New Testament of people receiving the Holy Ghost, we see that tongues is the initial sign. Here are the accounts recorded in the Book of Acts.

- The birth of the church (Pentecost Sunday) – Acts 2:1-4

*“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:4)*

- The believers in Samaria (Acts 8:5-25)

*“Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 8:17)*

- The household of Cornelius (Acts Chapter 10)

*“For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God....” (Acts 10:46)*

- Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-20)

*“And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hand on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received his sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.” (Acts 9:17-18)*

- Paul and the believers outside of Ephesus (Acts 19:1-6)

*“And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them: and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.” (Acts 19:6)*

An analysis of the previous passages from the Book of Acts will show that in three of these instances when people received the Holy Ghost, the Bible clearly states that they spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4, 10:46, 19:6). In fact, in the account of Cornelius and his household receiving the Holy Ghost, it plainly states that the disciples knew the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost because they heard them speak in tongues (Acts 10:45-46).”

### **Paul’s Conversion and Tongues**

When we look at the conversion of Paul in Acts 9:17-18, it says that Ananias was sent so that Paul could receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Even though it doesn’t say that Paul spoke in tongues when he received the Holy Ghost in the Book of Acts, we know that Paul did speak in tongues because Paul told the Corinthian church that he spoke in tongues.

*“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all” (I Corinthians 14:18)*

This statement is revealing because it lets us know that Paul did speak in tongues when he received the Holy Ghost. We also know that Paul believed in speaking in tongues when a person receives the Holy Ghost from the account in Acts 19:1-6 with the believers from Ephesus. The account in Acts 19 reveals several points.

- Paul expected all believers to receive the Holy Ghost or else he would not have asked them if they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed (Acts 19:2).

- After they were baptized in water, Paul came and laid his hands on them so that they could receive the Holy Ghost (Acts 19:6), indicating that it is a separate experience from water baptism.
- If Paul thought the believers had already received the Holy Ghost when they were baptized, he would not have bothered to lay hands on them to receive the Holy Ghost.
- When Paul laid his hands on the believers, the Holy Ghost came on them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied, indicating that they had received the Holy Ghost.

### **The Believers in Samaria**

The account in Acts Chapter 8 does not say the believers spoke in tongues; however, a careful analysis will reveal that they did speak in tongues. The account states the following:

- Philip preached Jesus Christ to the people (Acts 8:5)
- The people listened and believed (Acts 8:6, 12)
- People were delivered from demons and healed (Acts 8:7)
- There was great joy (Acts 8:8)
- People were baptized in water in Jesus' name (Acts 8:12, 16)
- No one had received the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:14-16)

When we look at this account, we find the following: that people can believe, be delivered, be healed, have great joy, and be baptized in water and still not have the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:14-16). This leads to the next question: how did the disciples know that these people had not received the Holy Ghost? Since the passage tells us that the Samaritans had not received the Holy Ghost, this tells us the early church had a recognizable sign that indicated when someone had received the Holy Ghost.

We then see the following:

- Peter and John laid hands on the believers and they received the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:17)
- Simon the sorcerer offered money to receive this power (Acts 8:18)

All these facts indicate the early church could tell when someone had received the Holy Ghost. Since the early church could tell when someone had received the Holy Ghost, this indicates they were looking for a specific sign. Since Simon the sorcerer offered Peter and John money for this power, this also reveals that when someone received the Holy Ghost, it was observable and dramatic. When we then look at the other accounts in the Bible of people receiving the Holy Ghost, we find that the only common sign and the only sign given is speaking in other tongues.

## The Gift of Tongues

Often a great point of confusion for believers today is the distinction between the Gift of Tongues and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost (Spirit). There are several distinctions between the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and the Gift of Tongues.

### First distinction:

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost = The Gift of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)

The Gift of Tongues = One of the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians Chapter 12

In both cases, a person will speak in tongues, but the purpose of speaking in tongues is different. When a person receives the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, they speak in tongues as a sign that they have received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. This lets both the church and the receiver know that they have received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost because they have spoken in tongues. When a person is used in the gift of tongues, the Spirit causes that person to speak in an unknown language for the distinct purpose of delivering a message to the church in a supernatural way. Normally, someone will also be used in the gift of interpretation of tongues to give the understanding of the tongues and bring forth the message.

### Second Distinction:

When a person speaks in tongues while receiving the Holy Ghost, no interpretation is needed

When a person is used in the gift of tongues, there is supposed to be an interpretation

In both Acts 10:44-48 and Acts 19:1-6, it states that people spoke in tongues, but it doesn't say anything about an interpretation. In Acts 8:17-18 when they received the Holy Ghost, it doesn't say anything about interpretation. Often people will refer to Acts 2:1-38 to support the idea that there should be an interpretation. This is said because people in the crowd heard the disciples speaking to them in their home land languages. In this case there really is no interpretation because others already understood the languages. The gift of tongues is normally used to give a message to the church, but the people that understood tongues were bystanders and wanted to know what this meant. If this was the gift of tongues in operation, then we would expect that no one would understand the tongues and then God would use someone to interpret the tongues.

When people witnessed the Disciples speaking in tongues, Peter did not say that the event was the gift of tongues. Peter clearly states that it represented the pouring out of God's Spirit on humanity, which means people being filled with the Holy Ghost. (Acts 2:12-18)

### Third Distinction:

Different Greek words are used when referring to the Gift of the Holy Ghost and the gifts of the Spirit

Greek for "gift" When referring to the Baptism of the Holy Ghost = doran

Greek for "gift" when referring to the gifts of the Spirit = charis

In the Book of Acts we find the Greek word “doran” being used; in I Corinthians we find the Greek word “charis” being used.

**Fourth Distinction:**

If the accounts of people speaking in tongues in the Book of Acts referred to the “gift of tongues”, they would violate the rules that Paul gave the church for the operation of the gift of tongues.

In I Corinthians 14:27-28, Paul is giving instructions for the proper operation of the gift of tongues. Paul states that only two to three people at the most should speak in tongues when the gift of tongues is in operation and then one at a time. After someone has spoken in tongues, they are to wait for an interpretation and if no interpretation is given after the third time, then speaking a message in tongues should stop.

When we look at the accounts from the Book of Acts Chapters, 2, 8, 10 and 19, it is clear that there are more than 2-3 people speaking in tongues at the same time. There is no hint that anyone is waiting for an interpretation. Since God doesn't violate His own Word, it is clear that the gift of tongues and the Baptism of the Holy Ghost are two different experiences but both involve tongues.

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost is for every believer while the gift of tongues is only for some.

John 7:38-39 says the following:

*“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive...)”*

Peter said on the Day of Pentecost,

*“...and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:38-29)*

**Is the Baptism of the Holy Ghost With Tongues For Today?**

There are some people who don't think the Baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues is for today. When the apostle Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost about receiving the Holy Ghost, he said these words:

*“...Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” (Acts 2:38-39)*

Peter said that the gift of the Holy Ghost (the promise), was for as many as the Lord would call. Since the Lord is still calling people to get saved today, that would mean the Holy Ghost is still for today. The Gospel of John also tells us that all believers are supposed to receive the Holy Ghost.

*“He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive...)”*  
(John 7:38-39)

Also when Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost, he stated that the outpouring of the Holy Ghost was a fulfillment of prophecy that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh.

*“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh...”*  
(Acts 2:17)

This would indicate that the Baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial sign of speaking in tongues is a sign that God is still drawing people to himself.

### **What About I Corinthians 13:10?**

Some people refer to a passage in I Corinthians 13:10 to indicate that tongues are not for today, which says,

*“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”*  
(I Cor 13:10)

Those that use this passage to support that tongues are not for today will say that “that which is perfect” refers to the “Word of God” or the Bible, and that now that we have the Bible, then we don’t need tongues and the gifts. A closer look at the passage will show that saying tongues don’t occur today because they were only needed until we had the “Word of God” is out of context.

First, the verse says when that which is perfect is come then that which is in part will be done away. The preceding verse, I Corinthians 13:9, says we know in part. If tongues have stopped, then knowledge and prophecy have also stopped. I do not believe that knowledge or prophecy has stopped.

Second, “that which is perfect” actually refers to godly love. Paul ended the previous chapter of Corinthians (Chapter 12) by saying,

*“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.”* (I Cor 12:31)

Paul then follows that statement with Chapter 13 of I Corinthians, showing how “charity” (godly love) is better than all the gifts that a person can have or any sacrifices a person makes. “That which is perfect” actually refers to godly love and since God is love, it is really saying we will need the gifts until the Lord comes back for His church.

Third, the Bible tells us that the Lord gave us apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints until we reach the unity of faith and stature of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). That means the church will have apostles and prophets until the Lord comes. It is difficult to believe that we would have apostles and prophets without the gifts of the Spirit, which also means tongues will be here as long as there are apostles and prophets.

## Other Operations of Tongues

Many people are also confused about tongues because there are several operations of tongues in the Bible. Tongues are used in the following ways in the Bible.

- Initial sign of receiving the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:4, 10:45-46, 19:6)
- Gift of Kinds of Tongues (I Cor 12:10, 14:27-30)
- Praying in Tongues (I Cor 14:2, 4, 14-15, 18, Rom 8:26-27, Jude 1:20)
- Singing in Tongues (I Cor 14:15)

## Praying and Singing in Tongues

Singing and praying in tongues comes under the heading of worship as well as private devotion. Worship includes praying and singing. Praying in tongues, singing in tongues, and worshipping in tongues are a natural part of a church service. The tongues are a result of a person having the Holy Ghost. When the Holy Ghost starts to move in a person, it is very natural to start to speak in tongues or even sing in tongues. The Bible compares the Holy Spirit moving in us to a well of water springing up and rivers of living water, so it shouldn't be surprising if a person overflows with praise and worship in tongues (John 4:14, 7:38).

Praying in tongues is important because when a person prays in tongues, they enter into a level of prayer where the Spirit of God is directing the prayer and not our own human mind. When the Spirit starts to direct the prayer, this is where we start praying according to the will of God and we also can enter into what is called intercessory prayer. Paul referred to this in Romans 8:26-27 and also Jude in Jude 1:20.

*"...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." (Rom 8:26)*

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

Notice that praying in Holy Ghost (tongues) will build up a person's faith. This doesn't mean it will increase a person's faith, but it will fortify or strengthen what is already there. In order to increase faith, we need to hear the Word of God (Rom 10:17).

## Gift of Kinds (Divers) Tongues

The gift of kinds of tongues is a gift of the Spirit where a person speaks in an unknown tongue for the purpose of delivering a message to the church. This gift is coupled with the gift of interpretation of tongues (I Cor 12:10). The rules for the operation of the gift of tongues are found in I Corinthians 14:26-33. The gift of kinds (divers) tongues requires interpretation to function properly. This is different from the speaking in tongues when a person receives the Holy Ghost. When someone received the Holy Ghost in the Bible, we can see that no interpretation was necessary, but the tongues were a sign indicating the people had received the Holy Ghost (Acts 10:45-46).

When Paul addressed the Corinthian church, he was not saying don't speak in tongues when you worship, but he was giving guidelines for the proper use of the gift of tongues and he was not referring to receiving the Holy Ghost or worshipping in tongues. I think a key verse is I Corinthians 14:19.

*"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." (I Cor 14:19)*

The picture I Corinthians 14:19 conveys is someone addressing the congregation because Paul speaks of teaching others. This shows us that Paul is not making a general statement saying that there should be no speaking in tongues during a service, but his statement is directed towards addressing the congregation.

In order to properly understand what Paul is saying about the gift of tongues, you must place the chapter in the context of the whole epistle. I Corinthians was written to address some specific problems. A study of the epistle will reveal that the Corinthian church was a carnal and immature church. Members of the congregation were using gifts of the Spirit to show off who was the most spiritual. One of the gifts which was apparently highly esteemed was the gift of tongues. It would not be surprising that people with a Greek background would think tongues was the best gift because the priestesses at the Oracle of Delphi (well-known Greek temple in ancient times) spoke in tongues and the priests gave interpretations.

In summary, Paul was simply saying, when a person is addressing the congregation (preaching, teaching, testifying), the rest of the congregation is not really built up if all you do is speak in tongues, unless an interpretation is given. If the Spirit is actually giving a message to the congregation in tongues, then at the most only three people should speak the message in tongues one at a time, and if no interpretation is given after the third time, let the service move on. Paul was saying that if you really value speaking under the anointing of the Spirit, pray for the gift of prophecy so that people will understand what you are saying and be built up; but when it comes to worship, singing in tongues, praying in tongues, and speaking in tongues is fine because the individual is built up.

Paul closes his instructions on tongues with the following:

*"Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophecy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let everything be done decently and in order." (I Cor 14:39-40)*

## **Why Would God Use Tongues?**

You may wonder why God would choose tongues as a sign of receiving the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. The Bible doesn't say specifically but does give us some clues. The Book of James tells us that the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity and that no man can tame the tongue (James 3:5-8). Since no man can tame the tongue, that means only God can tame the tongue. It seems that God chose something that would signify a person was under the control of the Holy Ghost which is the tongue. In order to receive the Holy Ghost, a person must repent of their sins, believe that Jesus is the savior, and yield their voice and tongue to God in faith.