

Speaking In Tongues - In The Light Of Scripture

Hendrik Leendert Heijkoop

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Speaking in other languages (tongues) without having learned these languages does not occur in the Old Testament. Only one prophecy in reference to it (Isa.28:11-13) is found, and if this were not cited in 1 Corinthians 14:21 with express reference to speaking in tongues we would in all likelihood not even have connected it therewith. The sense of the passage becomes clear from its context. Because the priests and prophets in Israel no longer were open to true knowledge and the divine report (v. 7-10), God would speak to them through people with unintelligible speech and strange tongue. These are their enemies who would bring judgment upon them. And the Holy Spirit uses this passage in order to make clear in 1 Corinthians 14 that tongues are a sign to unbelievers and not to believers (v. 21, 22).

We do not find speaking in tongues in the Gospels either other than in the prophecy of the Lord Jesus in Mark 16:17. But since this verse out of Mark is so frequently cited as proof I must dwell upon it a bit. In verse 14 the Lord comes to the *eleven* and reproaches their unbelief and hardness of heart. Then in verse 15 He gives them the commission to preach the gospel to all the creation. and in verse 16 He says what its consequences would be to the hearers. In verse 17 He then says to them (that is. to the eleven in connection with His reproach of their unbelief in verse 14) that signs would follow those who would believe. In verse 20 they go forth and the Lord fulfills His promise and confirms the *Word* by the signs following upon it.

From this we see:

1. That the signs were only given as *confirmation* of the Word (compare John 2:23-25).
2. It does not say that the signs would follow *all* believers.
3. The promise was only given directly to the eleven. and verse 20 says that when this Gospel was written the promise was fulfilled. This is in accord with Hebrews 2:3, 4. "So great salvation. which having had its commencement in being spoken of by the Lord, has been confirmed to us by those who have heard; God bearing. besides, witness with them to it. both by signs and wonders. and various acts of power. and distributions of the Holy Spirit, according to his will."

In follows too from 2 Corinthians 12:12 that the signs were an evidence of apostleship. And an apostle had to have seen the Lord (Acts 1:21-26; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8, 9).

In Acts 2 we find speaking in tongues taking place for the first time. The Holy Spirit comes upon earth and baptizes those believers who in a certain sense had each been standing separately for himself into one body, the assembly (1 Cor. 12:13). Up to that day the Holy Spirit had certainly worked upon earth, but had never dwelt there other than in the Lord Jesus (John 3:34; Col. 1:19). Now He came upon earth in order to dwell here - in the assembly which He formed through His baptism, and in each individual believer. Should this mighty fact of God the Holy Spirit coming to dwell upon earth pass by unnoticed? Just as the advent of the Son of God upon earth was accompanied by signs: a multitude of angels in the Bethlehem countryside and a star in the East, so too the advent of the Holy Spirit. But here too the signs were not visible before the whole world, but rather only before a small group of people. But the consequences of this great fact become evident to every one who wants to become convinced (John 7:17).

In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit does not come in the form of a dove. This was possible only with the Lord Jesus, the only One pure and spotless, who went His way in meekness and uprightness. Here the emphasis is placed upon testimony: parted tongues as of fire.

I would call attention to the fact that the Greek word "glossa" used here means language as well as tongue. When, for example, the tongue is mentioned in the Epistle of James, this word is used. But it is also used for language, as in 1 Corinthians 13, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels," and in Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15, "Out of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation," etc.

Now, this word is used in Acts 2:3 ("parted *tongues*, as of fire"), but also in verse 4 ("began to speak with other *tongues*"), and likewise in verse 11 where the multitude of foreign Jews says, "We hear them speaking in our own tongues the great things of God." This word *glossa* furthermore is used everywhere where mention is made of speaking in tongues (Acts 10:46; 19:6; and 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14). Besides this the Greek word *dialektos* (dialect) appears, but only in Acts 1:19; 2:8; 21:40; 22:2; 26:14.

From this follows that the Holy Spirit - in accord with the announcement by the Lord Jesus (John 15:26; 16:7-14) - manifests Himself in the character of a testimony: "Parted tongues, as of fire." It is not *one*, but rather parted tongues. The testimony thus will no longer be limited to one language as before Pentecost (see, for example, Matt. 10:5), but rather will go out to many peoples. And as a consequence of this they speak in other languages, and all the foreign Jews hear them speaking in their own languages the great things of God. This gives us to know the purpose of the speaking in tongues, namely that the glad tidings of God's grace is breaking through the boundaries of Israel and is now going out to all peoples and nations and tongues, and is thereby being used of the Holy Spirit as the means to take away the hindrance existing since the confusion of tongues at Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), the hindrance to preaching the Gospel to all peoples (Acts 2:7, 8). The disciples, who were unlettered and uninstructed men (Acts 4:13), speak of God to men of strange tongue in the languages. Through this the supernatural divine character of their message is demonstrated. And convinced thereby, the men listen devoutly as Peter speaks to them, and three thousand souls are converted.

As we have seen above, other than in chapter 2, we find speaking in tongues in Acts only in 10:46 and 19:6. In chapter 10 it is mentioned of some from among the Gentiles, while in chapter 19 it is mentioned of believing Jews who until that time had been disciples of John the Baptist but not yet Christians, who are being added to the assembly.

All three cases in the Acts thus manifestly bear the character of the beginning of the assembly, and in all three cases it has to do with whole groups of people who *all* speak in tongues and receive this gift *without* having prayed for it.

In the epistles we find speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14 only. And there we find the following assertions:

1. Every manifestation of the Spirit - thus also speaking in tongues - is given for profit (12:7).
2. Not all spoke in tongues, but the Spirit gave this to *some* (12:8-11, 28-30).
3. Speaking in tongues is at the very bottom of God's Word's order of rank (12:8-10, 28-30). That this is truly an order of rank becomes evident in the reading of these sections. Both in verses 28 and 29 the apostles are mentioned first.
4. One should in no wise conclude from this that speaking in tongues would be a lasting gift, for the apostles, who are mentioned first, also were only for the beginning. According to 1 Corinthians 9:1 (see also Acts 1:21, 22) it was necessary for an apostle to have seen the Lord. Thus no new apostles could arise. But besides this 1 Corinthians 3 and Ephesians 2 and 3 tell us that the apostles laid the foundation of the assembly. Now it is evident that this happens only once, and that at the beginning.
5. The gift of tongues was not given to be exercised in the assembly, but rather as a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor. 14:19-25). And not for unbelievers, either, who would not be able to understand it (14:23), but on the contrary for such who could understand it, where it would truly be a sign of the power of God. This is thus in full accord with that which we have seen in Acts 2.

We have thus found:

- a. Speaking in tongues is announced only in Mark 16, being given as a confirmation of the spoken word of the gospel, and is only applied to the preaching of the apostles.
- b. We find it only in Acts 2, 10, and 19, where it very evidently is connected with the *beginning* of the assembly.
- c. Besides this we find that it is only mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, and this indeed by way of correction.
- d. From both Acts as well as 1 Corinthians it follows that existing languages were spoken there where they were understood, and that the gift of speaking in tongues was not given to be exercised in the assembly, though this was *permitted* in a limited measure but only when an interpreter was present.
- e. Speaking in tongues is not connected with being filled with the Holy Spirit.

If everything in Scripture thus indicates that the gift of tongues is associated with the *beginning* of the assembly, it is certainly necessary to be very careful and to take great pains to test every assertion by the Word of God. So much the more since Scripture expressly tells us that the devil and his angels assume the appearance of angels of light, and also that signs and wonders and deceiving spirits may come from the devil (2 Thess. 2:9; 2 Chron. 18:21; Acts 16:16 among other passages).

History, too, expressly confirms this. Speaking in unknown tongues was also found in the heathen world. The pagan writer Plato who lived about 400B. C. already wrote that certain persons did not speak their own language but that of demons who dwelt in them (Vlechtwerken 1, page 140 of Clemens Alexandrinus, Sythoff edition, 1914). Vergil likewise speaks of this.

Irving, who declared that the Lord Jesus had a sinful nature, spoke in tongues. The Mormons profess to speak in tongues. And so it goes.

May we bear in mind as we examine this that Satan does not only assume the form of an angel of light, but that he also often mixes his work together with good things and lets it be carried on through real believers (Matt. 16:21-23). But the good that so often is found in a movement does not make the whole movement good. Yes, if true believers are found in it, then *everything is wrong* either, but whether *everything is in accord* with Scripture. And then, for example, one is struck by that which is never openly taught by those who speak in tongues, but which is one of its characteristic practical phenomena: namely, that *everywhere* where speaking in tongues has a place of prominence *women* in the main *have the leading part*, so that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is thus completely disregarded. And this is a well-known phenomenon in all kinds of wicked and non-Christian groups. Just think of Christian Science (Mrs. Eddy), of Theosophy (Mrs. Blavatsky and later Annie Besant), of the Seventh Day Adventists (Mrs. White), etc. It is a known fact that among the Spiritists there are at least a dozen female mediums for every male medium.

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