

Acts 2:1-4

The ability to speak with tongues is a claim made by a great number of denominations. Obviously all the different charismatic groups claim to be "tongue speakers", yet even among those not regarded as charismatic can be found those who are "tongue speakers" including Catholic, Baptists, Methodists and, in some isolated instances, even churches of Christ. "Tongue Speaking" is a subject worthy of study. We ask that for a moment you lay aside your concept of "tongue speaking" and study the scriptures with us to see what the Word says about speaking with tongues.

When Mark records Jesus' great commission to His apostles, he records the following: "And these signs shall accompany them that believe; in my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them: they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (16:17-18). Pentecost was the beginning of this marvel of "tongue speaking" for Acts 2:4 reports: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The promise to the apostles that they would speak with "new tongues" was fulfilled on Pentecost.

What Were These Tongues?

Tongues at Pentecost were languages which could be understood. Three times Luke expresses the amazement, yet bewilderment, of the assembled multitude because they understood all the speakers speaking in their own tongues, verses 6, 8, 12. Some explain this to mean that the apostles spoke in one tongue and those present heard in another, his own native language. The text says they "SPOKE with other tongues" and that the multitude HEARD them SPEAKING in their own tongues (Acts 2:4, 6). The miracle was upon the tongue, not the ear. It is true there were only 12 apostles and 15 different countries or cities named, but that does not mean 15 different languages were involved. Those familiar with the ancient Roman world of Luke's day tell us that no more than 7 or 8 different languages would have been spoken in those 15 different places.

Was There A "Heavenly" Tongue Which Humans Did Not Understand?

This is what some affirm regarding the tongues of 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14. Without dispute, the tongues of Pentecost were known languages,

but what about the tongues in Corinth? The languages again were unknown by the speaker, 1 Cor. 14:1f. But, were these tongues of 1 Corinthians "known languages" or were they different from the tongues in Acts 2? It is in 1 Corinthians that the King James version speaks of "unknown tongues". Although the translators intended to clarify understanding by supplying the word "unknown", unfortunately they promoted misunderstanding causing some men to conclude that there were two different kinds of tongues: one "heavenly", the other earthly. Admittedly there are difficulties understanding the 14th chapter of 1 Corinthians but it can be understood. ONE THING IS CERTAIN: although some tongues were being spoken at Corinth, which none present understood, God intended that the tongue should be understood (1 Cor. 14:1-13). The difference between the tongues of Acts 2 and those of 1 Corinthians 14 lay not in that one was human and the other heavenly, but that Acts two was a proper use of the tongue (they were spoken to an audience which understood the tongue) and 1 Corinthians 14 was an improper use of the tongue: they were spoken to an audience which neither spoke nor understood that language, and which no interpreter interpreted.

What Was The Purpose of Tongues?

The modern concept of "tongue speaking" is that one speaks with tongues as a sign to him that he has been baptized in the Holy Ghost, and thus been saved, but that was not the purpose of tongues according to the scriptures. According to Mark, those who spoke with tongues confirmed the word by or through these tongues (Mark 16:20). Thus, tongues were not a "sign" to the speaker, but a "sign" to the hearer for "these signs (including 'tongue speaking') would accompany them that believe." On the other hand, 1 Corinthians 14:22 specifically tells that the "tongue" was not a sign to the believer, but to the unbeliever. If "tongue speaking" were a sign of Holy Spirit baptism and thus salvation to the speaker, you would have the speaker an unbeliever and a man saved in unbelief! Everyone recognizes the unbeliever is lost (Mark 16:15-16; Heb. 11:6).

"Tongue speaking" was a sign to the unbeliever. It was on the day of Pentecost. Those who were present had their attention arrested by this unusual experience and were ready to listen to the message these "tongue speakers" were speaking to them. The subsequent testimony that Peter and the other apostles gave concerning the resurrection of Christ and His exaltation was established as true, in part, by the sign of tongues which those present had seen and heard. The purpose of

tongues as with all other signs, was to confirm the Word (Mark 16:20; Heb. 2:1-4).

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