

Tongues – A Supernatural Sign Of The Holy Spirit

By Denise Bostic

Most Christians have read in the Book of Acts about the outpouring of God's Spirit on the Day of Pentecost yet many have not experienced the power and manifestations that the Holy Spirit brought to the Church. One such manifestation is something called "speaking in tongues." There is lack of understanding among many people about what speaking in tongues is. Many think that it is flaky religious people who are speaking in some kind of gibberish that cannot be understood by others. When experiencing the genuine manifestation of tongues though, we find that these are supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit, a sign if you will, of God communicating directly with mankind through yielded, human vessels so that they may experience the reality of Him.

What are speaking in tongues and why is this mentioned in the Bible? First and foremost we must understand that the word **tongues** is just another word for **languages**. This will help us have a better understanding as we continue if we understand that we are speaking of known languages that exist in the world. As we will discover later, these languages may be unknown or unlearned by the speaker, but can be understood by those who know the specific language or those who receive a supernatural interpretation. This will be explained later in greater detail.

The most famous passage in the Bible that is commonly referred to concerning speaking in other languages is in Acts chapter two. **"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."** (Acts 2: 1-4 KJV) In the Living Translation it says, **"And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in languages they didn't know, for the Holy Spirit gave them this ability."** (Acts 2:4)

Those that those present on the day of Pentecost were speaking languages that they had not learned naturally. This is confirmed by the Greek usage of the word tongues. It means, **"to speak with new tongues which the speaker has not learned previously."** And, **"to speak in other (languages) than their native i.e. foreign tongues."** (Joseph Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament 1100) The question to be asked here is how were these believers able to speak in languages that they had not learned? The answer is in the same passage, **"And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in languages that they didn't know, for the Holy Spirit gave them this ability."** (Acts 2:4 L7) These were believers in Christ who had been baptized or filled with the Spirit of God. They were so filled by the Holy Spirit that He began to move and speak through them supernaturally. These believers had supernatural help to move beyond their natural capabilities to do so. These believers were empowered by God's Spirit to speak in languages that they did not know. Speaking in tongues or other languages then is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

Why would God choose to display this particular manifestation of His Spirit? God makes His reasons known. On the Day of Pentecost, people did not understand what was happening. The crowd hearing this amazing wonder thought these believers were drunk! Peter, under the inspiration of the same Spirit, explains what is taking place. **"Listen, all of you, visitors and residents of Jerusalem alike! Some of you are saying these men are drunk! It isn't true! It's much too early for that! People don't get drunk by 9:00 A.M.! No! What you see this morning was predicted centuries ago by the prophet Joel – 'IN THE LAST DAYS,' God say, 'I WILL POUR OUT MY HOLY SPIRIT UPON ALL MANKIND, AND YOUR SONS AND**

DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN DREAM DREAMS. YES, THE HOLY SPIRIT SHALL COME UPON MY SERVANTS, MEN AND WOMEN ALIKE, AND THEY SHALL PROPHECY. AND I WILL CAUSE STRANGE DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE HEAVENS AND ON THE EARTH...” (Acts 2:14-19)

We learn from this passage that believers speaking supernaturally in other languages and prophesying is a fulfillment of prophecy from the Old Testament. God had promised the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to those that would believe upon Him. God promised in the Old Testament that there was coming a time that He would speak to people through the supernatural sign of tongues. **“In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not...” (I Corinthians 14:21-22)**

After His resurrection, Jesus foretold that believers would speak with new tongues as a supernatural sign of the Holy Spirit. **“And these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues...” (Mark 16:17)** God had promised the coming of His Spirit for all who believe. Before His death, Jesus promised His disciples that God the Father would send them the Holy Spirit. (Read John 14:16-18,26, 16:7-14) After Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection, He appeared to and taught His disciples for forty days. Before His ascension to heaven, He instructs them, **“Not to leave Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them in fulfillment of the Father’s promise, a matter he had previously discussed with them. ‘JOHN BAPTIZED YOU WITH WATER,’ he reminded them, ‘BUT YOU SHALL BE BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT IN JUST A FEW DAYS.’” (Acts 1:4-5)**

When believers are born again, they receive the Holy Spirit as a deposit or down payment for eternal life and are baptized in water shortly afterward, but after receiving salvation, believers may receive, become filled with or baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire, which is a subsequent experience following salvation. The purpose in being filled or baptized in the Spirit is so that believers may have power to be witnesses of Jesus for He explained, **“BUT WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU, YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER TO TESTIFY ABOUT ME WITH GREAT EFFECT, TO THE PEOPLE IN JERUSALEM, THROUGHOUT JUDEA, IN SAMARIA, AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, ABOUT MY DEATH AND RESURRECTION.” (Acts 1:8)**

The prophecy of God pouring out His Spirit by the Prophet Joel had signs (like speaking in tongues) and wonders accompanying it to confirm that it was of God. (Acts 2:16-20) It is a miracle for people to speak in languages that they do not know. Why does God display manifestations such as these? God has a purpose for everything that He does. Besides tongues being a fulfillment of God’s prophetic promise, He also has a purpose in the use of tongues. What is that purpose? The answer to this question is given in *I Corinthians 14:22*, **“Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not...”**

Why would God give this particular sign to unbelievers? It is for the purpose that He might speak them in such a supernatural way that is impossible for man to discredit. It is a way that others might hear, see the reality of and believe in Him. It is through this demonstration of the Holy Spirit’s power and the preaching of the Gospel of Christ that 3,000 people were saved on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:41) Besides Peter’s preaching, those in attendance heard believers speaking unlearned languages by supernatural means. **“Many godly Jews were in Jerusalem that day for the religious celebrations, having arrived from many nations. And when they heard the roaring of the sky above the house, crowds came running to see what it was all about, and were stunned to hear their own languages being spoken by the disciples. “How can this be?” they exclaimed. “For these men are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking all the native languages of the lands where we were born! Here we are –Parthians, Medes, Elamites, men from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia Minor, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, the Cyrene language areas of Libya, visitors from Rome- both Jews and Jewish converts- Cretans, and Arabians. And we all hear these men telling in our own languages about the mighty miracles of God!” (Acts 2:5-11)** They did not know how it was possible for these people from

Galilee to be speaking these multitudes of languages. These visitors to Jerusalem knew that they were experiencing a mighty miracle from God!

We read this historical occasion and are amazed but are the supernatural speaking of languages through modern day believers still relevant or necessary today? What do we learn from the Holy Scriptures? We are still under the dispensation of grace. The Holy Spirit and His gifts are given to the Church in the New Testament for believers to not only be born again into the Kingdom of God, but to receive empowerment to do the work that the Lord has given the Church to do in the earth until we have been perfected by Him. God still gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The Holy Spirit and His gifts are still needed until the return of Jesus for it is only then that we shall be perfected. **“All the special gifts and powers from God will someday come to an end, but love goes on forever. Someday prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge- these gifts will disappear. Now we know so little, even with our special gifts, and the preaching of those most gifted is still so poor. But when we have been made perfect and complete, then the need for these inadequate special gifts will come to an end, and they will disappear.”** (*I Corinthians 13:8-10*) Paul taught that someday that these gifts will not be necessary, but are necessary now for God's express purpose of helping us to continue on to perfection and to be mighty witnesses for the Lord. What perfection are we attaining to? We attain to grow up to become like Christ. (*Ephesians 4:11-16*)

The Apostle Paul taught the Church the purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and how to operate in them. In I Corinthians 12, we find Paul teaching the Church at Corinth about the gifts. Listed among these is a gift called **“divers kinds of tongues.”** (KJV) In the Living Translation it says, **“Those who speak in languages that they have never learned.”**(*I Corinthians 12:10*) What is the purpose of such gifts? **“The Holy Spirit displays God's power through each of us as a means of helping the entire church.”** (*I Corinthians 12:7 LT*) We learn from this passage that God gives us the gifts of the Spirit to empower us to not only build up one another in the Church, but also to do the work of the ministry when we go to the world.

There have been modern day examples of the use of tongues (or speaking in unlearned languages) among the Church. There are three different reasons in particular that tongues are used among believers. **First** is that other languages are spoken as a way of God speaking a message to the entire Church assembly through a vessel with the gift of tongues. Because it is in many instances unknown languages to the hearers, it therefore requires a supernatural interpretation as well.

Besides the gift of tongues being imparted by the Holy Spirit, there is also a gift imparted to certain believers as the Spirit wills called **“interpretation of tongues.”** (*I Corinthians 12:10*) This gifting empowers the believer by the Spirit to supernaturally interpret or know what the speaker in tongues is saying for the benefit of the whole congregation. The congregation benefits or profits by receiving edification, exhortation and comfort from God. (*I Corinthians 14:26-31*) Paul taught the Church that when a believer speaks in tongues, that they should also pray for the interpretation for the benefit of others understanding what is said. (*I Corinthians 14:13-16*)

There have been instances where the language being spoken was known to someone visiting in the congregation **that does know the language naturally.** One example is from one congregation in California whose Pastor spoke by the gift of tongues in Arabic. Even though he did not understand what he was saying, a lady visitor who knew Arabic was in their congregation that day and understood every word he said. She later came forth to testify what God had spoken to her. It was for her edification, comfort and exhortation, which led to her receiving financial help from that Church during a particularly difficult time in her life.

Second, tongues are for unbelievers. In this instance many times it is a message from God for that individual. The purpose for this is for God to make Himself known to the unbeliever with the purpose of leading them to salvation. On the day of Pentecost 3,000 people were added to the Church. They had

experienced the supernatural sign of believers' speaking in tongues and this helped to lead them to salvation in Christ.

Third, there is a prayer language where believers pray personally to God in unknown languages. These prayer languages are unknown to the individual unless they have supernatural interpretation, but God always knows these other languages of course. What is the reason for this? We as humans have weaknesses and Christians are no exception; this is why God sent us His Spirit, to help empower us to do His work in spite of our limitations and inabilities.

One way that the Holy Spirit helps the believer is to pray in supernatural power. **“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: 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. And he searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)** With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can pray in supernatural power for others and even benefit personally by building ourselves up in the faith. **“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.” (Jude 20)** The Holy Spirit helps empower us spiritually what we lack because of our human weaknesses.

God has always been a mystery to mankind. God is a Spirit and it is in this manner that He reveals Himself to man. God communicates to our spirits and therefore we cannot understand Him with our natural mind. Amazingly, Jesus came down out of heaven and eternity to bring and demonstrate God's message of love and salvation to us in our world. He came to reveal God and His spiritual realm to us in the earth. He is the exact representation of God. God has always communicated with man and still speaks to people today. Speaking in languages supernaturally through human vessels is only one of the many, many ways that God communicates with us to show us what He wants us to know, He also reveals Himself to man by performing many signs, wonders and miracles. God may also speak a word of prophecy through believers to encourage and strengthen others. *(1 Corinthians 14: 22)* These are all coming from the supernatural realm of God to the realm of man so that we might come to know Him and His ways. It takes faith (believing) for us to receive these things that God wants to give us.

God also speaks to us through His actions. He may do this through many ways such as through saving, protecting, healing and delivering us. He always has a purpose in everything He does and that purpose is always for doing good. When we find out His purpose in a given situation, we will come to understand what He is trying to convey to us. Many times people can misrepresent God, but that is because of our weaknesses and inabilities to represent Him properly, but it does not take away from His omnipotence, majesty and splendor. God's ways are not our ways but we can come to know them nonetheless because with God, all things are possible.

God gives us signs along the way to get our attention and point us toward Him. Signs are supernatural manifestations authenticated by God Himself. In *Mark 16:15*, when Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world to preach the gospel, He declared that signs would follow those who believed in Him. Signs in the Greek mean *of miracles and wonders by which God authenticates the men sent by Him, or by which men prove that the cause they are pleading is God's*. [4592, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament] God backs up His message with proof and power! He chooses to do this through people and nature. *(Mark 16:17,18, Acts 2:19-20)* He is reaching out from His heavenly realm to reach us in our natural world to prove to us that He loves us and that He cares. Whatever the sign, wonder or miracle, we can receive what God wants to give us, hear what He wants to tell us or be amazed at His awesomeness and know that He is real.