

## THE MIRACLE OF TONGUES

The Charismatic movement claims that miraculous “sign-gifts” such as miracles, healings, and tongues are to be considered normative. However, proper theology shows that the special SIGN-GIFTS had a special purpose related to the early church in the days of the apostles. Those gifts, including the legitimate sign-gift of tongues, have ceased by virtue of fulfillment of purpose.

### THE BACKGROUND OF TONGUES AS FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

#### **Deuteronomy 28:49 (NKJV)**

**49** The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand,

In Deuteronomy, God told His people Israel that when foreign people come on the scene speaking a language they did not understand that this would be an indication of JUDGMENT. Foreign speakers speaking an unknown language was therefore a SIGN of judgment for the Jews.

**DEFINITION:** TONGUES means LANGUAGES. To speak in a tongue was to miraculously speak a foreign language that one had never learned. A “tongue” was ALWAYS a real language. For example, my mother tongue is English. The gift of tongues was the gift of languages.

#### ***“TONGUES” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT***

There are essentially only TWO books in the N.T. that deal with the issue of TONGUES. They are the book of ACTS and the book of 1 CORINTHIANS.

The book of Acts is a historical book that tells us WHAT happened during the transitional early days of the Church in the apostolic era, but it doesn’t explicitly tell us the PURPOSE of the phenomenon of tongues.

The ONE place in the New Testament where the PURPOSE of tongues is clearly stated is found in 1 Corinthians 14:20-22 where Paul goes back to Isaiah 28:11 to provide an explanation of purpose.

Acts is a history book of the early church and emphasizes a TRANSITION from God working through the Jews to a Gentile emphasis. With the purpose of TONGUES being a SIGN OF JUDGMENT against the

UNBELIEVING JEWS it is therefore understandable why we see this gift being exercised in this context.

For example: On the day of PENTECOST in Acts 2 God was starting something brand new. This was the BIRTHDAY of the Church! As of then, God was temporarily setting aside the Jews as a nation who had rejected their MESSIAH, and at the same time, He was starting the CHURCH, which consists of both Jews and Gentiles but with mostly Gentiles in view. Later in Acts 10 (about 5 years later) as the gospel was taken to the Gentiles the gift of tongues was once again demonstrated, showing that the Gentiles also are included in what God is now doing (cf. Acts 2, 10, 19).

The gift of TONGUES is dealt with at some length in 1 Corinthians but only because the Corinthian Church was misusing the gift. 1 Corinthians is a book of CORRECTION. In the process of correcting them, Paul states the purpose of tongues in 1 Cor. 14:20-22.

### **1 Corinthians 14:20–22 (NKJV)**

**20** Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

**21** In the law it is written: “With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,” says the Lord.

**22** Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

This is the ONLY place in the N.T. where the PURPOSE of tongues is specifically stated and here Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11 to explain its purpose.

### **Isaiah 28:11 (NKJV)**

**11** For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people,

Note Paul’s clarification:

\* 1Cor. 14:20 – “***In UNDERSTANDING be mature.***” (emphasis mine)

\* 1Cor. 14:21 - “***this people***” as quoted from Isaiah 28:11 can only refer to the Jews.

\* 1 Cor.14:22 - “***a sign***” in CONTEXT is the idea of a sign of JUDGMENT.

\* 1 Cor.14:22 - “***unbelievers***” The sign value is directed at UNBELIEVING JEWS.

**CONCLUSION:** Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8 stated that TONGUES would cease. NONE of the later DOCTRINAL books even mention tongues! After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, tongues did cease. JUDGMENT had fallen upon the Jews, and they were scattered over the face of the earth. Tongues essentially remained CEASED all through the church age until a woman in Kansas in the early 1900s supposedly had a revival of the TONGUES experience.

One thing led to another, and today, many people don't even try to understand the purpose of tongues - they just emphasize having an experience. Often, they think they are more SPIRITUAL for doing so, but in fact, the opposite is true. The Biblical gift has ceased by fulfillment of purpose.

What is being practiced today is either a demonic counterfeit or a psychological deception related to emotional frenzy, but it is NOT the operative sign gift of languages depicting judgment on the Jews as was practiced in the transitional apostolic days of the early Church.

The miraculous sign-gift of tongues ceased in the early days of the Church and it remains ceased by reason of fulfillment of purpose!