

The Nature and Purpose of Speaking in Tongues

Isaiah 28:11

Isaiah 28:11 For by people of strange (stammering)¹ lips and with a foreign tongue the LORD will speak to this people,

Isaiah 28:9-11 “To whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, those taken from the breast? ¹⁰ For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” ¹¹ For by people of strange lips and with a foreign tongue the LORD will speak to this people,

I. Speaking in Tongues in the Old Testament

Genesis 11:1-4 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

Genesis 11:5-7 And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

Genesis 11:8-9 So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Deuteronomy 28:15-16 “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. ¹⁶ Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field.

Deuteronomy 28:47-49 Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, ⁴⁸ therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. ⁴⁹ The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand,

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¹ אָלָל “stammering” in NASB, KJV, NKJV, LSB.

Jeremiah 5:15 “Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the LORD. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, **a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say.**

II. Speaking in Tongues on the Day of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and **began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

Acts 2:5-8 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem **Jews, devout men from every nation** under heaven.⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?

Acts 2:9-12 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—**we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.**¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

A. What happened?

- The apostles received the supernatural ability to speak in the languages of the nations assembled in Jerusalem that day.

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- They preached about Jesus Christ and what God had done through Him.
- Their message had a specific meaning. They knew what they were talking about. They wanted to convey to their listeners a very concrete message about Christ and repentance.
- The people gathered there understood what the disciples were talking about.

B. What did it mean?

- Judgment on Israel because of unbelief.
- The conclusion of the initial period of Israel's special role in God's plan of salvation.

Mark 15:37-39 And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

- Pentecost indicated that Christ, His salvation, and the Gospel belong directly to all the nations of the earth without the mediation of Israel.
- The spreading the Gospel in the fastest way possible.

III. Speaking in Tongues in the Early Church

Acts 11:2-4 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." ⁴ But Peter began and explained it to them in order:

Acts 11:15-18 As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

So, so far, we see a few facts:

- God used foreign languages as a sign of judgment on Israel's unbelief.
- God gave the apostles the supernatural ability to speak in tongues in order to judge Israel's rejection of the Messiah while rapidly spreading the gospel throughout the Roman Empire.
- God gives believers in another special group exactly the same gift as the apostles received in the beginning, to confirm that they, too, have been received by God into the church of Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 14:7-9 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? ⁸ And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.

1 Corinthians 14:20-22 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. ²¹ In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." ²² Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.

1 Corinthians 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.

^{KJV} **1 Corinthians 14:14** For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

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Practical Takeaways

- Prophecy, or proclamation and explanation of the word of God is a real sign of God for believers.
- Speaking in tongues had been a sign for unbelieving jews which was sent to them in early times of the Church.
- Instead of seeking ecstatic experiences those who believe in Jesus Christ should seek His Word to know it and live by it.
- The Bible is a remarkably accurate book, in which each part complements and explains other parts. Therefore every passage should be read and interpreted in light of everything else that we read in Scripture.