

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

BIBLICAL GIFT OF TONGUES

The Biblical gift of tongues, which was prominent throughout the thirty-three years of which the book of Acts is the history, was the God-given knowledge of a foreign language with the ability to speak it as if it were one's mother tongue. Any claimed experience today that does not live up to the example given in Acts 2 is a human substitute for the divine gift, and when passed off as the Biblical experience it must be condemned as a Satanic delusion.

If this judgment should seem harsh and opinionated, let it be known that it is the considered judgment and studied opinion of one who has loved, believed, read, studied, and taught the Word of God for fifty-two years. The reader can confirm the correctness of this judgment if he will turn to the Bible and judge all claimed personal experiences by what is written there. **"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"** (Isa. 8: 20). This includes all business men, movie stars, and clergymen. They are not exempt from this test. The one whose mind is filled with the facts of God's word can never accept ecstatic sounds, the utterance of gibberish, head jerking, eye rolling, and other pumped-up manifestations as being things that have a parallel in the sacred scriptures.

In view of the purpose and program of God in the Acts period and the short time allotted for their full accomplishment (Rom. 9:28), the ability to speak in any language that the circumstances required was an absolute imperative. What had to be done could never have been done apart from this. To appreciate this we must consider the situation that then existed. It was a time of little education and very little travel. Each village usually had its own language or dialect and the people had few outside contacts. If a man traveled a dozen miles he usually came upon a different dialect, and if he

went twenty miles he would encounter a different language. We who live in the United States have a hard time understanding this. We travel 3000 miles from coast to coast and 1500 miles from border to border, and are always able to understand and be understood. I have found one language to be sufficient for a lifetime of work all over this vast land, but in the Acts period one language would have been sufficient for only a few weeks work, if the work were evangelizing.

Missionaries still face this problem today, but there is no gift of instant knowledge of a language to help them in their task as there was in the Acts period. At present in the small country Liberia, the oldest of the self-governing African republics, with an area of 43,000 square miles (about the same as Ohio) and a population of 1,290,000 (about half as many as Chicago, Illinois) there are forty five languages spoken. The official language, English, is spoken and understood only by the small upper class who have had educational advantages. The Bible (or parts of it) has been translated into only nine of the twelve principal languages. All this makes widespread evangelizing of this little country almost impossible.

A situation somewhat comparable to this existed outside (and even within) Palestine when the disciples assembled on that memorable day of Pentecost. In fact they were faced with the reality that there were seventeen languages and dialects spoken by those whom God intended should hear His message on that day (Acts 2:5, 9-11). These foreign-born Jews had every right to hear the gospel in their own vernacular, just as the 120 had heard it in theirs. And they did! They heard no mutterings, they heard no gibberish, they heard no "ecstatic sounds". They heard God's message in their own language (Acts 2: 8, 11).

It was God's program, purpose and intent in the Acts period that every Israelite upon the earth should hear the salvation bringing word of God and have a clear-cut opportunity to receive or reject the man Jesus as Israel's long-promised Messiah and as a personal Savior. This was the pledge of God, and it was in writing: **"But as it is written, To whom He was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand"** (Rom. 15:21). God made good on this pledge. **"And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them"** (Mark 16:20). **"But I say, have they (Israel) not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world"** (Rom. 10:18).

Thus it was that God-commissioned men (apostles), speaking a God-inspired message, performed a humanly impossible task in less than thirty-three years. Every Israelite on earth was covered in some manner, those inside the land and those in the dispersion.' And in order to avoid all delays, all misunderstandings, and any need for fallible, human translation, the gospel was always spoken in the pure mother tongue of one for whom it was intended. This was 'the normal experience of the witnesses. Truly, the "gift of tongues" was a meaningful reality in the Acts period. It was a powerful sign to the unbeliever (1 Cor. 14:22), and it was a miracle worthy of the God who gave men this ability. Shame on those who would today pass off their "bah, bah, bah, glo, glo, glo, ticky, tacky, monee, monee" as being the same as that miracle of God of the Acts dispensation. We reject this human, unintelligible uttering of sounds as being nothing more than a ridiculous human counterfeit.

It was the promise of the Lord Jesus that those believers who were commissioned as witnesses would "speak with new tongues" (Mark 16:17, Acts 1:8). The word "speak" positively means to utter words (not just sounds), to give oral expression to thoughts by means of words, not the repetition of unintelligible gibberish. When we say, "He speaks Spanish", we mean that he expresses himself in the language of the Spanish people. We do not mean that he makes Spanish sounds. The Greek word translated "speak" (*laleo*) is found 295 times in the New Testament. In every occurrence, no exceptions, it means to utter intelligible discourse.

On that day of Pentecost when the ability to speak in a foreign language was first given, there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5). Among these were found seventeen languages and dialects. These men probably knew some Hebrew, which they seldom used, and of course some Aramaic, depending on how long they had been in Jerusalem. But the language they could speak fluently and understand without difficulty was that of the country in which they were born and where they had long been sojourners. Little wonder then that they were confounded when everyone of them heard some member of the 120 disciples speaking in his own language (Acts 2:6). They knew that these men were Galileans, and they asked how it was that they heard every man speaking in the tongues wherein they were born (Acts 2:8). **"We do hear them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God"** (Acts 2: 11), is their positive testimony to the nature of this miracle. These are the words of those

present on that day, and they settle beyond all doubt what the Biblical gift of speaking in tongues really was.

The modern tongue speakers do not spend much time trying to find what the truth of Acts 2 really is. They impose upon it a theory they have constructed in advance, grab from it a few phrases, and then rush on to 1 Corinthians 14, a chapter concerning which there consists a great lack of understanding and honest interpretation. This serves their purpose admirably, and the unwarranted insertion of the word *unknown* in four passages seems to help them all the more. However, no matter how much they make of 1 Cor. 14 they pay little attention to the words of Paul in it who said, **"I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than. ten thousand words in an unknown tongue"** (1 Cor. 14: 19). The modern tongue advocate would much rather make ten thousand unintelligible sounds than to speak five words that make sense, if their zeal for and exaltation of the tongue experience is any indication.

The key to 1 Corinthians 14 is that there were men in Corinth who had an inordinate love of languages, the ones they knew by natural processes and the ones obtained by gift of God. A grammatical and historical study of this chapter will reveal the problem that existed there and that with which Paul is dealing. While the Corinthians addressed in this epistle were Jews so far as their ancestry was concerned (1 Cor. 10:4 demonstrates this and 12:2 does not contradict it), they had adopted many Greek mores, manners, and attitudes. The Greeks worshipped wisdom, their heroes were scholars and philosophers, they sought after wisdom (1: 22), loved the enticing words of man's wisdom (2:4), and as a result of following along these lines many of the Corinthian believers were puffed up (4:18,19).

In the ancient world a knowledge of several languages was a most valuable commodity. It was then, even as today, evidence of learning and knowledge of which one could be justly proud. Of their knowledge of languages some in Corinth were abnormally proud. I will admit that I too would have a sense of pride if I could speak fluent Spanish, and doubly proud if I could also handle French as if it were my own tongue. However, I trust I would always have the grace of humility and never use these tongues to make a display of learning, as some in Corinth were doing.

The Apostle Paul was a linguist extraordinary. We know for sure that he spoke Hebrew (Acts 22:2) and Greek (21:37). Having lived long in Palestine the Aramaic would have been familiar to him, also the Homaic language which we call Latin. Besides these he had knowledge of many God-given languages to meet the needs of his far-flung ministry. These are what he was referring to when he said, "I thank God that I speak with tongues more than you all" (1 Cor. 14:18).

Some in Corinth were using foreign languages when there was no reason for it. They were using these to display knowledge and make a show of wisdom. This is what Paul is rebuking. He states that even though they may be declaring truths never revealed before (secrets), no man understands them (14: 2) if they speak in a foreign tongue, that while these built up (edified) themselves they did not build up the ecclesia (14: 4). While he wished that they all had command of languages, he would prefer that they prophesied, that is, spoke forth the Word of God (14:5). Even if he came to them speaking in the various languages at his command it was still important that he say something (14:6), and if he did not bring his message in words easy to be understood he would be speaking into the air (14:9). However, if a man did have a truth to declare, and had only one language in which to say it, and this was not a language common to the majority, then let him pray that he may be able to translate (interpret) his message into their language (14: 13).

These are the matters that are dealt with in 1 Corinthians 14. There is nothing in this chapter to support the rattling off of unintelligible sounds, and it should not be twisted to do so. The careful Bible student cannot accept this human, pumped-up uttering of sounds as being a Biblical experience. To claim that it is, is a Satanic delusion.

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