Speaking in Tongues?

Summary

Tongues appear only three times in the New Covenant record — and each time, at a specific turning point. This article walks through all three to ask what tongues actually proved, and what role they should play today.

- The three instances: Pentecost, Cornelius's household, the Ephesian disciples.
- Each read as a one-time milestone in the early Congregation's formation, not ongoing proof of the Spirit's presence.
- Four commonly asked questions addressed directly.
- Paul's rule in 1 Corinthians 14: orderly, interpretable, and secondary to love.

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Speaking in Tongues?

Some false churches emphasize this practice and teach that Israelites should hope and perhaps even pray for the experience of speaking in tongues. Others do not encourage it and some even forbid it. What does the Bible say?

There is no mention of speaking in other tongues in the Old Covenant.

Shortly after the Messiah had risen, His disciples were gathered during the annual festival of Pentecost *(Acts 2:1)*. A miraculous sound filled the building, and tongues as of fire appeared to sit on them *(vv. 2-3)*. The disciples were "filled with His Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues" *(V. 4)*. These other "tongues" were foreign languages readily understood by the people who were native to many other nations *(vv. 8-11)*.

About 10 years later, after Peter had preached to a group of Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, the "Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word". The Bible records that the Jewish Israelites heard them "speak with tongues and magnify Yahweh" *(10:44-46)*.

Another decade after this account, Paul taught some disciples in Ephesus about His Holy Spirit, and "when Paul had laid hands on them, His Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied" *(19:1-6)*.

In all three of these accounts, speaking in tongues was a miracle associated with His Holy Spirit, as related to three, very special developments in the early Congregation of believers.

Based on the events described, several questions are frequently asked:

1) Did every Israelite who received His Holy Spirit speak in tongues?

2) Does speaking in tongues prove His Holy Spirit is in a man or woman?

3) Are those who speak in tongues closer to Yahweh?

4) What role should tongue speaking have in our life or in Congregation?

Let's look at each of these questions:

1) The New Covenant does not indicate that every Israelite spoke in tongues. Yah'shua Himself did not "speak in tongues". On the Day of Pentecost for example, 3,000 people "continued steadfastly in the

apostle's doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" *(Acts 2:42)*. There is no mention of tongues of fire or the sound of rushing wind or of speaking in tongues.

After Peter and John were rebuked by the Jewish leaders, the apostles needed encouragement from Yahweh. "The place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with His Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of Yahweh with boldness" *(Acts 4:31).*

There is no mention of speaking in tongues even though those who spoke were filled with His Holy Spirit. Nor is there any mention of speaking with tongues when the Ethiopian eunuch was converted *(Acts 8:38),* when the apostle Paul was converted *(Acts 9:17,18)* or when Paul first preached in Asia *(Acts 13:48-52)*.

The three uniquely special occurrences of speaking in tongues mentioned in Acts, give miraculous evidence and divine approval for three major developments in the Israelite Congregation of called out ones. The first occurrence was the formation of the Congregation on the Day of Pentecost.

Yahweh ensured that the miracle focused the attention of the crowd and permitted Peter, who was not a rabbi, to speak to them with authority. The second occurrence announced the call of the Gentiles into the Congregation. Since the Jewish Israelites had historically separated themselves from the Gentiles, these special signs were given to PROVE to the Jews that Yahweh had authorized Peter to speak and He had accepted the Gentiles into the Congregation as His children *(Acts 15:7,8).* The final example is used to validate those who had previously been led by John the Baptist and were now followers of New Covenant Israelite faith *(Acts 19:1-6).*

Speaking in tongues was a miracle that gave spectacular support and timely evidence to the apostles' efforts to establish the Congregation of believers; the called out ones, fulfilling the words of Mark 16:15-17, which says that speaking in "new tongues" would be one of the signs that followed the apostles. This list of signs includes protection from poisonous snakes and poisonous drinks, and is a short sampling of the types of miracles Yahweh's disciples would experience. It does not mean every Israelite would experience every sign.

Paul listed speaking with tongues as one of the "gifts of His Spirit" *(1 Cor. 12:4-10).* Every Israelite does not receive every gift; Yahweh gives them as He wishes *(vv. 8-11)*. This chapter explains that Yahweh appoints the members where He wishes and gives them abilities according to the needs of the congregation. Not all are prophets, not all are teachers, and not all speak in tongues *(vv. 28-30).*

None of the signs listed can be singled out as the one and only test or evidence of His Holy Spirit. In fact, the Bible warns that the "un" holy spirit; the devil, can cause any of these same "gifts" to be manifested in a man or woman - indicating that the "many", not the "few" would be deceived in this very way *(Matt. 24:10-24).*

2) Speaking in tongues is no assurance that a man or woman is being influenced by His Holy Spirit. Tongue speaking - influenced by the devil, also occurs in many widely-practiced non-Christian heathen

religions of today, as well as some ancient Greek religions. Speaking in tongues may be falsified or fabricated, it may originate with evil spirits, it may come from self-induced emotionally altered consciousness, or it may come from Yahweh.

In any event it should be tested to see that it is in harmony with Yahweh's Word and way of life *(1 John 4:1)*. Scripture has greater priority as a test of truth than historical practice or one's experience.

3) Israelites who legitimately speak in tongues are not more spiritual than others and if they don't have love, they are useless noisemakers - though they may speak in human or angelic languages *(1 Cor. 13:1)*. The gift of tongues, like all other gifts is given as Yahweh decides *(1 Cor. 12:11)*. No one, no matter what gift he or she has, has any reason to be proud or to look down on others *(vv. 21-25)*.

4) Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14 that love is much more important in our lives than speaking in tongues or having any of the gifts of His Spirit. When speaking in tongues became a regular occurrence at the Congregation gathering in Corinth, it also became a cause for division *(v. 2)*.

Unlike the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, the Corinthian tongue speakers could not be understood. Paul points out that this does not help anyone - it was therefore not motivated by love - and he expressly told them not to do it unless someone could interpret *(v. 28)*.

Paul instructed that tongue speaking, if it were to be permitted in Congregation meetings, should be organized. Even if someone could interpret, only one man or woman should speak at a time *(vv. 27,40)*. Otherwise, confusion would result, which is ungodly *(v. 33)* and a poor witness to unbelievers *(v. 23)*. Tongue speaking, if it truly is from Yahweh, IS SUBJECT TO CONSCIOUS CONTROL *(Gal. 5:23)*.

The apostle Paul further admonished that for the sake of order in Congregation meetings, tongue speaking is best kept private *(1 Cor. 14:28)*.

It may, if genuine, have a private value in prayer, between the speaker and Yahweh *(v. 28)*. If a man or woman believes he or she has the gift, that man or woman should pray for the gift of interpretation *(v. 13)*.

ALL Spiritual gifts are to be used to help others, and only if the speaking can be understood and makes sense, can it help others.

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