

CHAPTER 2

TONGUES FULFILLED AT PENTECOST

Acts 2

Pentecost marks the beginning of the Church. On this important day Spirit-baptism first took place (see Ephesians 1:22-23 and 1 Corinthians 12:13; compare with Matthew 3:11; 16:18; Acts 1:5; 11:15-17). Thus for the first time believers were immersed into a new and unique organism, the body of Christ. God's new program was inaugurated on this momentous day!

This day also marks the beginning of the gift of tongues. For the first time the Lord's promise of Mark 16:17 was fulfilled as the disciples spoke with new tongues. Tongues as a *sign-gift* made its first historical appearance in Acts 2.

We can safely conclude, then, that tongues was a *sign* which served to *signal* some aspect of God's new program. Tongues pointed to the fact that God was doing something new and different! No longer would God's witness be a nation (Isaiah 43:10-12), but God's

witnesses would be among all nations (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:47; cf. Colossians 1:27). No longer would Jerusalem be the focal point (cf. 1 Kings 10:1-9), rather it would be merely the starting point (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). No longer would God's message go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6), but it would go to every nation and kindred and people and *tongue* (Matthew 28:19-20; Revelation 5:9).

As a nation, Israel, through unbelief and rebellion, failed to be faithful custodians of the truth of God, and they even crucified the Lord of glory. As a result the nation was temporarily laid aside (Romans 9–11) and God is presently taking from the nations a people for His Name (Acts 15:14). To signal such a drastic and consequential change of program, God gave a very simple sign (object lesson) to an unbelieving nation—the gift of tongues.

Tongues, since the ancient experience of Babel, has conveyed an ominous message of rebellion, judgment, and dispersion (Genesis 11, and compare Deuteronomy 28:49; Isaiah 28:11; Jeremiah 5:15). Now, at the beginning of the church age, God sets forth this doomful and judgmental sign to a rebellious people whose official judgment at the hands of the Romans was only forty years away (70 A.D.), to be followed by a worldwide dispersion that would last for 2000 years!!

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4).

On the day of Pentecost the disciples spoke with “other tongues” (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:21). The adjective “other” (*heterais*) could be translated “different.” They spoke in “different tongues.” The word “tongues” is plural, indicating that they spoke in many languages on that day—languages which were “different” from what they had previously known or spoken. So the tongues that they spoke were both *new* (Mark 16:17) and *different* (Acts 2:4).

How were they able to speak in different tongues? Obviously they would need supernatural enabling to speak in new and different languages. Thus we read that “the *Spirit* gave them utterance.” It was the Spirit of God who enabled them to “speak forth” in such a unique way. The gift of tongues was a supernatural, Spirit-given ability (cf. Acts 2:15-17).

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5).

It is highly significant that on this special day God had Jewish representatives present from “every nation under heaven.” It is as if God were saying to these Jews: “I want you to understand what is involved in My *new program*, and I want you to appreciate the worldwide scope of My great commission (cf. Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47). Therefore I am going to give you a preview of world evangelization. I am going to give you an audio-visual aid (namely, *tongues*) to show you that God’s message is going to go to every

nation under Heaven, even to every nation that is represented here today.”

As Merrill F. Unger has noted: “The supernatural display of languages at Pentecost was a harbinger of the dominant feature of worldwide evangelism to be realized in the new age and was a sign to the Jews that the Holy Spirit had been given to work out in believers Christ’s glorious salvation purchased on the cross and to equip them to proclaim the wonderful message of this salvation to every creature under heaven.”²

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language (Acts 2:6).

The multitude caught wind that something strange and extraordinary was taking place, so they assembled together to investigate this phenomenon. Why were they confounded and perplexed? Because every one of these Jews (who were from every nation under Heaven) heard them speak in his own language or dialect (*dialektōi*, the language of a particular nation or region). It is obvious then that the different tongues which they heard were real languages.

And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? (Acts 2:7-8)

These Jews were amazed because of the miracle of Galileans speaking in foreign languages (compare Mark 14:70). “How can Galileans be speaking in our native tongue?” The word translated “tongue” is again the word “language.” The Galilean disciples were speaking in the *native languages* of these Jews who had come from all over the known world.

At the time of the King James translation (1611), the word “tongues” simply meant “languages.”* This can be seen in the translation of Revelation 9:11. The text simply gives a name “in Hebrew” and “in Greek” (see NASV) but the translators of the KJV say, “in the Hebrew tongue” and “in the Greek tongue.” The word “tongue,” which is not in the Greek text, is obviously inserted as a synonym for “language.”³

Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes (Acts 2:9-10).

God’s new program was for the gospel to go to all of these regions. God’s message must be proclaimed to every nation and tongue under Heaven. Even on this

* Most editions of the Authorized King James Version contain these words on the title page: “The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments translated out of the *original tongues*.” Today it would be more natural to say, “translated out of the *original languages*.”

day when the Church was born, God's message was made known to representatives of every nation under Heaven, as if God were giving the Jews a preliminary indication of His worldwide intent.

Robert G. Gramacki comments on these verses: "Not only did the disciples speak different languages, but they also spoke various dialects of the same language. The Phrygians and Pamphylans, for instance, both spoke Greek, but in different idioms; the Parthians, Medes, and Elamites all spoke Persian, but in different provincial forms."⁴

Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God (Acts 2:11).

When this verse is compared with verse 8 it becomes evident that tongues is equated with languages:

Verse 8—"We hear. . . in our own language [dialect]"

Verse 11—"We hear. . . in our tongues"

Verse 11 explains the *content* of the tongues-speaking. What did these Jews hear? Did they hear nonsense syllables? Did they hear ecstatic utterances? Did they hear unintelligible gibberish? No, they heard "the wonderful works of God," or as it could be rendered, "the great things (*megaleia*) of God." These Galileans were filled with praise for what God had done, and the Spirit gave them the ability (verse 4) to communicate this praise in languages which were foreign and unknown

to them. No interpreter was needed since every man heard the message in his own native dialect (verses 8,11).

The tongues-speaking served only an indirect evangelistic purpose, in that the tongues phenomenon prepared the way for Peter's convicting message. Tongues did in Acts 2 what the healing of the lame man did in Acts 3. It served as an attention getter for the gospel message that was to follow. Tongues in Acts 2 was a *sign*, indicating and pointing to the fact that the gospel would go into all the world—to every kindred and *tongue* and people and nation (Revelation 5:9), according to the great commission of our Lord. If the gift of tongues served to signal the inauguration of God's new program, then by implication God's old program (Israel) must be set aside. The bringing in of the new necessitates the going out of the old!

And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine (Acts 2:12-13).

It is of interest to note the reaction of these foreign Jews to the miraculous tongues-speaking (verse 12). They were all amazed and perplexed (cf. verses 7-8), and they wanted an explanation. They wanted to know the *meaning* ("What meaneth this?") of the remarkable exhibition of *different languages* which they had just witnessed. They had heard the "great things of God" communicated in their own native languages by mere Galileans! How was this possible?

“Others mocking” (verse 13) offered an explanation of the tongues spectacle. Who were these mockers? The word “others” (*heteros*) refers to a group of Jews *different* from the foreign Jews mentioned in verses 5-12. These mockers were local Jews from Palestine and Judea who apparently did not understand the foreign tongues being spoken. The tongues-speakers seemed to be producing “uncertain sounds” (1 Corinthians 14:23)!

They thus accused the Galileans of drunkenness. These mockers provided a naturalistic explanation of a phenomenon that was obviously supernatural, thus robbing the Spirit of God of the credit and honor that was due Him (cf. verse 4). Peter then seized this opportunity to address the multitude and to show the absurdity of such a naturalistic explanation.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:14-18).

The first reason for the absurdity of the charge of drunkenness was the simple fact that it was only

about 9:00 A.M. and people do not generally get drunk at such an hour (verse 15). (Usually that is the time when they are recovering from the night before.)

Peter's second reason is taken from Joel's prophecy concerning the supernatural outpouring of the Spirit in the last days. He used this Scripture to show that what had just taken place was obviously the miraculous working of the Spirit of God (cf. verse 4). In essence, Peter was saying to these mockers, "We are not drunk with wine, as you suppose, but we are filled with the Spirit (verse 4). Just as there will be a supernatural outpouring of the Spirit in the last days producing great signs and wonders (verses 17-20), so there has been a supernatural outpouring of the Spirit today producing the sign-gift of tongues. What you have witnessed is just what Joel spoke of—the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit! Therefore, I totally reject your absurd and naturalistic explanation of drunkenness!"

Following this sermon introduction, Peter preached unto them Christ crucified and risen. Three thousand persons responded in the right way to his message and were added to the newly-formed body of Christ, God's unique organism.