

Tongues and Healing

“When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. ... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”
—Acts 2:1-4

FOR MANY CENTURIES

leaders and members of various Christian church denominations have claimed the ability to “speak with other tongues,” even as did those at Pentecost and afterward in the Early Church. Their claim has been that speaking in tongues is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to believers. Further, the assertion is made that this gift, together with the gift of healing, has been available all down through the centuries since Pentecost, just as it was in apostolic times.

In 2014, the National Congregations Study, created by Duke University professor Mark Chaves, released data covering a period of fifteen years, from 1998 to 2012, which showed an increase in the

practice of speaking in tongues in the United States. The data gathered was based on interviews conducted with church leaders of more than one thousand representative congregations throughout the country, and among numerous denominations. In 1998, 19% of those surveyed claimed the practice of speaking in tongues existed within their congregations. By 2006 that percentage had grown to 21%, and by 2012 it stood at 24%. As to the reason for these increases, Professor Chaves noted that there seems to be a growing trend in American religion towards “a certain kind of experience for people, away from just religious teachings—to make it more emotionally engaging, not just intellectually engaging.”

It is important to note that the practice of speaking in tongues today, and as it has been followed since the death of the twelve apostles, involves the utterance of words, or sounds, which are not understandable by the one speaking, nor by their hearers. In other words, it is speech in an “unknown language” to any human being and has generally been identified with the term “glossolalia.” Glossolalia is defined as “speech in languages or tongues.” However, in the case of the present practice of speaking in tongues, since there is no understandable language spoken, no meaning can be given to the words uttered. It is this fact that helps to reveal the unscriptural basis of modern “speaking with tongues.”—I Cor. 14:6,9

THE ORIGINAL NEED

The ability of those in the Early Church to “speak in other tongues” had nothing to do with utterances

which could not be understood—"unknown tongues." Rather, in order to more effectively spread the Gospel message, the ability to speak, or to be understood, in languages other than their own native tongues filled a real need at that time. Take, for example, the situation which existed at Pentecost when the gift of the Holy Spirit was first given to and employed by those upon whom it was endowed. Each year at the time of Pentecost thousands of Jews made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to keep the "feast of weeks," as had been commanded in the Mosaic Law. (Lev. 23:15,16; Deut. 16:10) These came from all parts of the known world to which they had been scattered over the course of the prior six centuries, since first being conquered and taken captive by the Babylonian empire. During the first century, most of them knew only the language of their adopted country.

Those who heard the disciples testify on the day of Pentecost concerning the resurrection of Jesus, and the Gospel centered in him, "were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, 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 [Gentile converts to Judaism], Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God."—Acts 2:7-11

From this it is clear that the original speaking in tongues through the power of the Holy Spirit was not the uttering of unknown words having no meaning

to the speaker or the hearer. It was, rather, a speaking and hearing of real languages, for the benefit of those to whom the witness of the Gospel could not have otherwise been given in such an efficient manner. Under the circumstances, a critical need existed. Here were Israelites, born in foreign lands, who did not know the language of their home country. God desired that a testimony concerning the Gospel of Christ be presented to these while gathered in Jerusalem for the feast. The most effective way of doing this was through the miracle of speaking with "tongues" of other known languages. Thus a real purpose was accomplished.

This Pentecostal experience of the disciples' speaking with tongues was the most outstanding one of which we have record in the Early Church. Yet this "gift" of the Spirit remained with many for a considerable time during the first century, for the reason that the need which existed at Pentecost continued, although not likely manifest on such a large scale. Not all in the Early Church had this gift. Referring to this, together with other special gifts enjoyed by some of the brethren at that time, the Apostle Paul wrote, "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."—I Cor. 12:28-31

Here the thought is clear, that just as not all in the Early Church were apostles, or prophets, so all

had not been given the gift of speaking with tongues. In Acts 19:6 we are informed that the Apostle Paul laid his hands on certain ones, and they received the Holy Spirit and began to speak with tongues, and prophesied. This seems to imply that this gift was one which could be secured only through one of the apostles. It then would reasonably follow that when the Lord's specially chosen apostles fell asleep in death, and those upon whom they conferred the gift of speaking with tongues died, this miraculous gift would cease.—I Cor. 13:8

Paul emphasizes that speaking in an unknown tongue is of no profit to the hearer unless what is said is understood and interpreted. (I Cor. 14:1-33) In the modern practice of speaking with tongues, little thought is given to the apostle's admonitions along this line. However, the interpretation of tongues was very important in the Early Church. In comparing the value of speaking in tongues with talking plainly in the language of the audience—which he refers to as prophesying—Paul said, “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. ... Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.”—vss. 4,5

In this statement Paul reveals an interesting fact concerning speaking with tongues as it was practiced by certain believers in his day. Those who thus spoke could also interpret what they said if they wished, because part of this gift was to know the meaning of what they were saying as it would be spoken in other languages. However, the apostle's words indicate that not all who spoke in other

tongues were giving the interpretation, which made such speaking of no value to their hearers. All of this emphasizes the fact that the various tongues of that time were real languages. They were "unknown" only to those who did not speak that language, and who had not received the gift of speaking and interpreting such tongues.

As we have noted, the greatest need for the use of this gift was at Pentecost. However, we also understand that as the apostles carried the Gospel to as many places as they were directed by the Lord, they would often come in contact with those who could not understand their native language. Under such circumstances, the special gift they had received would be a great help in their witness work. Additionally, new believers would be reached who spoke a different language than that of the majority in a given congregation. When these all would meet together, they could be mutually edified through one or more of the number who could speak or interpret those languages. As Paul explains, though, a message delivered thus would not be understood by the congregation as a whole unless it was interpreted.

As time went on, the faithful ones in the Early Church carried the Gospel of Christ into one country after another. Believers arose in all the various nations who were able to continue the work of proclaiming the message among their own people in their native language. Thus, the need for speaking with foreign tongues diminished. In addition, while at Pentecost and for a while thereafter there would be no opportunity of interpreting from one language to another in written form, this possibility also

developed later, doing away with the need of speaking with tongues.

It is rather interesting to realize how relatively little is said in the Bible about speaking with tongues, even during the period when it was one of the divinely authorized gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are informed of what occurred along this line at Pentecost. When the first Gentiles, Cornelius and his family, accepted the Gospel, they enjoyed a similar experience as did those at Pentecost. (Acts 10:45,46) On another occasion, Paul laid his hands on certain believers and they received the gift of tongues.—Acts 19:6

Nothing else is said in the New Testament concerning speaking with tongues except Paul's observations in I Corinthians chapters 12, 13 and 14. In these chapters, as we have seen, he reveals that in any event only certain ones had been given the gift of tongues, and that this gift would cease. (I Cor. 13:8) As we have noted, in the 14th chapter the apostle minimizes the importance of this gift unless, through proper interpretation, it could be used for the edification of those who heard. Summing up this thought, Paul says, "Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air."—I Cor. 14:9

Paul further writes, "I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church 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." (vss. 18,19) Notice additionally the apostle's implication that speaking with tongues was for the benefit of unbelievers, not the church. "Wherefore," he says, "tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe

not.” (vs. 22) For this sign to mean anything to an unbeliever he would need to understand what was being said. The suggestion here is that an individual, hearing the message in his own language from one whom he knew could not ordinarily speak that language, would be tremendously moved by the power demonstrated by means of such a gift.

On the other hand, Paul indicates that if an entire congregation of believers comes together, all speaking in various tongues to each other, and a newly interested unbeliever joins their fellowship for the first time, he will be greatly confused by the cacophony of voices and likely conclude that they are all mad. (vs. 23) We gather from these various observations by the Apostle Paul that some even in his day were beginning to lose sight of the real purpose of the gift of tongues, even as those do today who believe that speaking with tongues is the uttering of sounds which no one, not even they themselves, can understand or interpret.

DIVINE HEALING

Many who speak in tongues also claim the ability to heal the sick through the use of miracle-working power. Indeed, Jesus performed miracles of healing, and the apostles were also given that ability. Jesus raised the dead, as did the Apostles Peter and Paul. (John 11:41-44; Acts 9:36-42; 20:8-10) These special gifts also passed away after they had served their purpose. It is well to remember that neither in the case of Jesus nor of the apostles were all the sick healed, or all the dead raised, as the plan of God calls for in the period described by Peter as the “times of restitution of all things.” (Acts 3:20,21)

Jesus' miracles of healing and raising the dead, as well as those performed by the apostles in the days of the Early Church, were as signs to help convince the unbelieving world of the authenticity and assurance of the promises pertaining to the future which were being presented as part of the Gospel message.

This was very appropriate in connection with the Jewish people. Throughout Old Testament times God's chosen people were accustomed to miracles. There were the miracles in conjunction with the exodus from Egypt, and under the leadership of Moses in the wilderness. There were miraculous demonstrations of God's power when Joshua was the leader of God's people, such as the crossing of Jordan, and the overthrow of Jericho.

There were miracles in connection with David's rulership, and later, when other faithful kings ruled over Israel. We are reminded of outstanding miracles in Elijah's day, when fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice which he had offered to God, and the awakening of the widow's son from death. Then followed Elisha, whom God similarly used to raise the son of the Shunammite woman from death. There was the deliverance of the three young Hebrew men in the fiery furnace, and of Daniel from the mouths of the lions.

Throughout this era of miracles God's prophets foretold the coming of Israel's Messiah, who would establish a world government in which the faithful Israelites would have a prominent part. Thus, it was natural for the people of this nation to expect that such a great one would be able to perform miracles, even as the lesser servants of God did in the past. Moreover, had not the prophets foretold that the

Messiah, the anointed Son of God, in addition to establishing a world government, would heal the sick and raise the dead?—Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:17,18; Hos. 13:14

While Jesus did not give any demonstrations of power along the line of establishing a new government in the earth, he did heal the sick and raise the dead. These miracles, together with his wonderful teachings, were sufficient to convince the honest-hearted of Israel that he was indeed the promised Messiah, and that their God was with him, blessing his ministry. John wrote of Jesus' miracles, saying concerning the turning of water into wine, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory." (John 2:11) We understand that Jesus' kingdom glory is referred to in this text, and that his miracles during his earthly ministry foreshadowed the greater, world-wide program of miracles which will be performed through the agencies of the Messianic kingdom.

THE DISCIPLES' POSITION

The position of the disciples among the unbelieving majority of Israelites as well as throughout the world in general was a difficult one. Indeed, they had been convinced that Jesus had been raised from the dead, that he had returned to heaven, and would come again to take them unto himself and to establish the long-promised Messianic kingdom. To unbelievers, however, the claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead must have seemed fanciful, especially since he was nowhere to be seen. To the Jewish religious leaders, and those under their

influence who had been responsible for Jesus' death, the claim of his resurrection stirred much opposition and bitterness.

Under these circumstances, the fact that the apostles in the Early Church were endowed with the gift of performing miracles on appropriate occasions would do much to help establish Christianity in the hearts of the sincere. They made good use of it to this end. We think of the time shortly after Pentecost when Peter and John healed the lame man at the gate of the temple called "Beautiful." We read that "as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering."—Acts 3:1-11

Immediately these two apostles had an audience which had been greatly impressed. When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things,

which God before hath shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.”—vss. 12-18

After stating that the miracle was based on faith in Jesus of Nazareth, Peter explained that Jesus would come again, that when he did, as God’s anointed representative, there would be a time of restitution, or restoration. The apostle states: “He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

GIFT OF HEALING CEASED

With the death of the apostles and those upon whom they conferred miraculous power, the gifts of healing and raising the dead ceased, for their purpose during the present age was accomplished. Throughout the period since, however, there have been those who claimed that they could perform miracles of healing, even up to the present time. Indeed, these claims are not limited to the professed Christian world. There are many among non-Christian religions who profess to be “healers.” In the Christian world, those who practice what they call “divine healing” claim to be following the example of Jesus and his apostles. What they seem to overlook, however, is that Jesus and the apostles additionally raised the dead. Since the days of the apostles, there is no record of any individual being raised from the dead, and so far as we know, no one has ever credibly claimed to have that ability.

We rejoice, however, that in “the times of restitution of all things” the dead will be awakened and given an opportunity to live forever on condition of obedience to the righteous laws of the Messianic kingdom which will then be ruling in the affairs of men. Those who have suffered and died following in the footsteps of Christ Jesus are brought forth in the “first resurrection,” to live and reign with him. (Rev. 20:6) These will be exalted to heavenly glory to be with the Lord. Mankind in general will be restored to life on the earth as humans. It will be then that “the ransomed of the LORD [all mankind, redeemed by the blood of Christ] shall return ... with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:10; 51:10,11; Matt. 20:28; I Tim. 2:3-6

The people will then be enlightened, for the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth “as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9) Instead of non-understandable “glossolalia” that is heard today when people attempt to speak with tongues, the Lord will “turn to the people a pure language,” or speech, which can be understood by all. (Zeph. 3:9) Healing will be permanent, and will include all diseases—physical, mental and moral. Finally, the Lord will “swallow up death in victory,” and mankind’s greatest and “last enemy” will be destroyed. (Isa. 25:8; 33:24; 35:5,6; I Cor. 15:24-26; Rev. 21:4) How thankful we should be that our Heavenly Father has such a wonderful plan for the salvation, enlightenment and eternal healing of the fallen and dying race. Let us be faithful in telling the whole world these blessed tidings. ■