

A BIBLICAL STUDY of TONGUES

by the late

Dr. John G. Mitchell

reformatted and edited

by: Mr. Gary S. Dykes

[several comments were added by Mr. Dykes, in brackets]

Is speaking in tongues the evidence of a Spirit-filled, Spirit controlled life, the outward manifestation of the baptism 'of the Spirit of God? This is one of the important questions at issue in the Christian world today. There is much preaching and writing concerning it, much discussion and questioning and inquiry. We hear of groups meeting in our universities and colleges, and in churches of every denomination, seeking this experience. In some of our religious magazines we find accounts of the experiences of those who claim a special anointing from God, evidenced by speaking tongues. I am sure this points out the fact that among God's people there are many hungry hearts with a great desire to know God and a real longing to see the power of God manifested.

However, one thing I have noticed as I have heard and read these testimonies is that the emphasis has always been on the experience and there is very little said about the teaching of the Scripture concerning it. There is a seeking of an experience rather than a searching of the Word of God. I believe the reason why there is misunderstanding and confusion is because there is not a clear understanding of all that the Word declares. Whatever we seek let us be sure that it is according to the Word of God. This cannot be emphasized too much.

If we seek an experience we will no doubt have one, but it may not be from God. I am very much afraid of the suggestion that we should be passive, as those who are seeking the gift of tongues are instructed to be. There is great danger here. There is nothing of this in Scripture. When one is passive he opens himself to that which could be wrong. There is a difference between passiveness and yieldedness. Yieldedness calls for the will. It is when our

hearts are seeking Him and our minds are filled with His Word that we experience that which God has for us.

As we begin this study, I want to say first of all that I have no desire to offend or hurt anyone who has had an experience with the Lord. However, I must say very kindly that I do not want to study this from an experiential viewpoint. Whatever I say, I want only to state and emphasize what the Scripture has declared. The tendency of many is to examine the Scripture in the light of experience rather than to examine experience in the light of Scripture. What I want to do is to search the Scriptures and examine this subject in the light of the Word of God.

THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT

I would like to consider first of all the ministry of the Spirit of God in the life of every believer. When we come into right relationship with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, there are four definite ministries of the Spirit accomplished by God in us:

1. We are born of the Spirit. This speaks of family relationship (John 1:12, 13 and 3:5. cf. James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23).

2. We are sealed by the Spirit. This speaks of preservation (Ephesians 1:13, 14 and 4:30; II Corinthians 1:22).

3. We are indwelt by the Spirit of God. This has to do with our testimony. Our bodies become the sanctuaries of the Holy Spirit, and we are His channels to express His character and life (John 14:17, 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19, 20).

4. We are baptized by the Spirit into the church, the body of Christ. This speaks of our union with Him (1 Corinthians 12:13). These four aspects of the ministry of the Spirit of God are true of

all believers. [this is the one baptism of Eph. 4:5, no priests or water is needed! GSD]

There is a fifth aspect which is a command. [or a statement, if in the present tense, middle voice: GSD]. We read in Ephesians 5:18, "Be filled with the Spirit." This has to do with our realization and enjoyment of what God has done for us. As Dr. Chafer has said, "The Spirit's filling is not a receiving of the Holy Spirit, since that was accomplished as part of salvation, nor is it a receiving of more of the Spirit. He is a Person, and by a yieldedness of the believer's life to Him, the Spirit will fulfill all that He came into the heart to do. The Spirit-filled life is a realization in actual experience of what has been possessed from the moment one is saved. The command to be filled indicates that the Christian's own fellowship with the Lord and faithfulness determine the degree of filling."

THE BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

Let us review now the Scripture pertaining to the baptism of the Spirit. There are seven verses in the New Testament where the statement, "baptized with the Holy Spirit", is used: Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5, Acts 11:16, and 1 Corinthians 12:13.

The first six of these are the same. "I indeed baptize you with water," said John, "but He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit." The seventh is 1 Corinthians 12:13. This is the only verse that gives an explanation of what the baptism of the Holy Spirit means. Here we read, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." It is very clearly stated that the baptism of the Spirit is an act of God whereby He puts every believer into the church, the body of Christ. All those who have come into right relationship with God through faith in our

Lord Jesus Christ are members of the body of Christ by the baptism of the Spirit of God.

The moment we put our trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, that very moment we not only became children of God but we became members of His body. [however, we prior existed as elected members, before we exercised faith: GSD]. The only way we are joined to the body of Christ is by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is true of every believer. “For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.”

There is no place in the New Testament after Pentecost where we are exhorted to seek or wait for the baptism of the Spirit, nor are we exhorted to tarry for the Spirit or for the gift of tongues.

If what many teach is true, it is strange that none of the apostles gave any instruction concerning it. It is used only in two books, Acts and Corinthians. Why not in others? Why did Paul not mention this in Romans or Ephesians? These are doctrinal books, and all other doctrines are there. Someone may say that there was no need for instruction since they had received the Spirit. If this is true, why did Paul go into detail concerning other truths they all knew and had experienced? For example, in the book of Romans, Paul takes nearly three chapters to teach us that we are unrighteous, then two more to explain how we are justified. He continues on to show how we are sanctified.

He clearly teaches all the truths of the Gospel but nowhere does he give any instruction concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit except this very clear and definite statement, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”

Some may say, “But what about the Lord’s command in Luke 24:49?” This verse says, “And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until you be

endued with power from on high.” Let us remember that the promise of the Father had not yet been given. Referring again to Acts 1:4, 5, we see where our Lord spake about this very thing. He “commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father.”

In chapter 2 of Acts they were obedient. They waited in Jerusalem. “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” What were they doing? They were waiting, as they had been told to do, for the promise of the Father. What did they do while they were waiting? They prayed and praised the Lord. They had a business meeting and elected Matthias to take the place of Judas.

And we read, “when the day of Pentecost was fully come,” something happened. “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 there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” It did not happen because they prayed. It did not happen because they waited, but because the time had come for the fulfillment of the promise. Just as our Lord was born at the right time, and died at the right time, so the Spirit of God came at the right time.

If we feel that we should obey Luke 24:49 today, then we too, should tarry in Jerusalem. Our Lord said, “I send the promise of My Father.” Where? At Jerusalem. That is the place where the Spirit of the Lord will come. But we do not wait for Him today because He has come.

In Acts 2 we have the initial outpouring of the Spirit, the time when the church of Jesus Christ was formed. It was by the baptism of the Spirit that believers were made one in the body of Christ. Today every believer, when he is accepted in the Beloved

One, is not only born of the Spirit, sealed by the Spirit, and indwelt by the Spirit, but he is also baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”

A question that is often asked is this: Is speaking with other tongues the evidence that we have been baptized by the Holy Spirit? There are those who teach that we today should have the same experience that the disciples had on the day of Pentecost, when the promise of the Father was fulfilled. Such people usually appeal to Acts 2:1-4, which is quoted above.

Those who make the assertion that we should have a Pentecostal experience do not expect the other manifestations mentioned here to be present, but they do say that everyone who has the Spirit must speak with tongues, and that there is no assurance that those who do not speak with tongues have the Spirit of God. If this were true only those who have spoken with tongues are baptized by the Spirit. Only those who have spoken with tongues are in the body of Christ. Only those who have spoken with tongues are saved. The Corinthian letter is the only epistle where the gift of tongues is mentioned. Here we read in 12:13 that all were baptized by one Spirit into the body of Christ. That all did not speak with tongues we know from Paul’s question in 12:30. It is also implied in 12:4-11.

THE PURPOSE OF TONGUES

It would be well for us in approaching this subject of tongues to read every passage in the Bible concerning it. There are six references, Isaiah 28:11, Acts 2, Acts 10, Acts 19, 1 Corinthians 12, and 1 Corinthians 14.

The first mention of tongues is in Isaiah 28, verse 11: “For with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people.” You remember that Isaiah brought God’s last appeal to Israel.

Jeremiah, about one hundred years afterward, prophesied their captivity. Isaiah said, "Come now, and let us reason together, said the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18). "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). In chapter 28, then, there is no question as to who is meant by "this people." It is Israel of whom He is speaking.

It is interesting and enlightening to notice that the last mention of tongues in Scripture is the quotation of this verse in Isaiah. "In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord," (1 Corinthians 14:21). This, I believe, gives the key to the purpose of tongues. He is speaking to this people. Let us look at each reference to tongues, keeping in mind that God is speaking to "this people", Israel.

In the New Testament the first mention of tongue is in Acts 2. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). On the day of Pentecost there were Jews from all parts of the world gathered for the feast. I believe they were all Jews. In addressing them, Peter said, "Ye men of Israel" (Acts 2:22). These men of Israel from all parts of the world heard the disciples speaking in tongues and magnifying the Lord. These were not unknown tongues, but the languages of those who heard them. These Jews from many countries were astonished that they heard in their own tongues the wonderful work of God. They were startled that these unlearned and ignorant men should speak so fluently in their own languages. Peter preached the gospel to them, and three thousand were saved.

In chapter 8 of Acts we have the story of how the Samaritans received the Spirit of God. Why is there no mention here of speaking in tongues? Because there were no unbelieving Jews present. Isaiah had said, "For with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people."

In Acts 10 we have the story of Peter preaching the gospel in the house of Cornelius. We read in verses 43 and 44, "To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the Word." Why did Cornelius speak in tongues? Because there were Christian Jews present who did not believe that the Spirit of God was for Gentiles. They would never have believed that the gospel was for Gentiles if they had not heard them speak with tongues.

The next passage is found in Acts 19. Paul had gone to Ephesus and was preaching in the synagogue. He found a group of people who were disciples of John. They had been told to believe an Christ who should come. Paul asked the question, "On believing did you receive the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 19:2 ASV). Their answer was, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Spirit." Then after Paul revealed to them the fact that our Lord had come, had died, and been raised, he baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus and laid hands on them. The Spirit of God 'came upon them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Who were these twelve men? They were Jews of the dispersion; that is, Jews who had been scattered and were living outside the land of Israel. They were disciples of John the Baptist, who ministered to Jews.

So we see that in the book of Acts there were four groups who were baptized with the Spirit and three of these spoke with tongues. In each case where tongues were exercised Jews were present.

As we have mentioned, we have in 1 Corinthians 14:21-23 the last mention of tongues and their place. "In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that you are mad?"

In verse 22 we read that tongues are for a sign to those who believe not. In verse 23 we read that tongues are a sign of madness to those who believe not. Is this a contradiction? No, for verse 22 is joined to verse 21 where Paul is dealing with the fact that tongues are a sign to the unbelieving Jews, although they do not accept it, but in verse 23 when the whole church is come together, both Jews and Gentiles, "will they not say you are mad?" This would seem to indicate that to the unbelieving Gentile it was simply madness. We know that the Jews required a sign, and in the following chapters (Isaiah 28, Act 2, 10, 19, 1 Corinthians 14: 21-22) it is evident that tongues were a special sign to Israel. "And yet for all that they will not hear."

We find three thousand people in one instance and five thousand in another instance who were saved through Peter's ministry. We are not told that they spoke with tongues.

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

Let us consider now what the Scriptures has to say about spiritual gifts. You will recall that we have the truth of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14. In chapter 12 we have the bestowal of the gifts, in chapter 13 the governing of the gifts, in

chapter 14 the exercise of the gifts. We must remember first of all that the Spirit of God is sovereign in the bestowal of gifts. He is also sovereign in the position He has given each one in the body of Christ. We know too, that all the gifts were given for the building up of the body of Christ. [temporary as well as the permanent gifts: GSD]

As we study these chapters we are aware that Paul had to write to the Corinthian church, not concerning the use of the gifts, but concerning their misuse. If they had not been misusing the gift of tongues there would have been no need to write as he did. In spite of all that the Corinthian church had they were a carnal people. In verse 7 of chapter 1 Paul said “ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of the Lord.” Yet he said four times in four verses (3:1-4) “And I brethren could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes.” This passage makes clear that spiritual gifts are not a sign of spirituality. (1 Corinthians 1:5-8 and 3:1-4).

In chapter 12, concerning the bestowal of gifts Paul reminds them that God is sovereign in this. Verses 27-31. “Now ye are all the body of Christ and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? – do all speak with tongues? But covet earnestly the best gifts.” In this chapter the list of spiritual gifts is given twice. In both, the gift of tongues is the least of the gifts. In the lists of spiritual gifts mentioned in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 the gift of tongues is not mentioned. Nor does Paul speak of it in any letter other than Corinthians.

In chapter 14:2-12 he compares the gifts of tongues and prophecy. In verses 13-20 he speaks of the necessity for clear interpretation when the gift of tongues is used. It is well to notice that the word “unknown” is in italics and was not in the original

text. [sadly it is in italics in the KJV: GSD]. The word tongues always means language, never incomprehensible utterances. In Acts the languages spoken were known and understood by the Jews of the dispersion who were in Jerusalem and heard the message on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:11 “We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” Undoubtedly the gift of tongues was given to the Corinthian church for the same reason. The city of Corinth was an important commercial center. Ships came into its two great harbors from all over the 'world. Obviously there was a Jewish community and Jewish traders who visited Corinth. Here too, it was a sign or evidence to the unbelieving Jews who heard, that the message preached was from God.

In verses 18-19 Paul wrote “I thank my God that I speak in 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 un-known tongue”– a language you do not understand. In verse 20, “Brethren be not children in understanding, in understanding be men.” Then in verse 21 he gives the explanation, “In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak to this people: and yet for all that they will not hear saith the Lord.”

It is a rather strange thing that only in these two chapters and in none of the other epistles is there anything said about the so-called sign gifts.

I am sure you have noticed as you have studied the Scriptures that when God gives a special revelation of Himself, there is always a demonstration of special power and miracles. For example, when God delivered Israel out of Egypt, they saw signs of God’s power. They miraculously crossed the Red Sea. They saw water come forth from the rock. God rained bread from heaven

and sent quails for food. At the giving of the law the power of God was manifested. In a time of apostasy, during the days of Elijah and Elisha, the power of God was evident to prove to Israel that they were His servants.

In the New Testament our Savior performed miracles. These were the credentials of the Messiah. In Matthew, chapter 8 through chapter 10, we read of lepers cleansed, demons cast out, blind eyes opened, the dead raised. In Chapter 10, He sent His disciples out with the same power. After chapter 12, there are few miracles. Israel had spurned their Messiah. Following His rejection, His miracles were always in answer to individual faith.

In the book of Acts, at the beginning of this new period of grace, the Jews required a sign. Is this Jesus the Messiah? The greatest sign to Israel was the resurrection which they did not receive. After Christ's resurrection the disciples performed miracles in His name. When Paul came on the scene, his message was to the Gentiles as Peter's was to the Jews. There was at this time a new message [the new message was Paul's GOSPEL: GSD]. to declare. There was a change from [Messianic] Judaism to Christianity. God authenticated His message to them by the manifestation of His power. "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul." (Acts 19-11). So we see the performing of the miraculous, a special power, evidenced when a new revelation is given. In these chapters it is very clear that tongues were a sign at the beginning of a new revelation and they were a sign to a special people, the Jew.

Conclusion

Do we need the gift of tongues in the church today? I believe not. It is evident that there were some gifts in the early church that were temporary. The purpose for which the gift of tongues was given was fulfilled. As we have emphasized, the gift was given as a

sign to unbelieving Jews of that day, not only those who did not know God, but those who doubted the good news of the Gospel. This was for them a confirmation that the message was from God.

Then too, when Paul wrote the Corinthian letter the Scripture was not complete. Why do we need the gift of tongues today when we have the complete revelation of God in His Word? I have heard tongues and interpretation on numerous occasions and I want to tell you frankly that I have never heard an interpretation that was a clear message. If we face the facts honestly, I am sure we will agree that the Word of God declares the truth far more simply and far more beautifully than any so called interpretation of tongues.

I fear that some Christians instead of diligently searching the Scripture would rather take an easy way. And there is no easy way nor are there short cuts to spirituality. Let us not be mentally lazy, but set ourselves to learn and to know all that God has revealed to us in His Word.

Before our Lord left His disciples, He gave them the promise of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom he would send. In John 14:17 He said, "He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Even though we have the complete revelation and the in-dwelling Spirit to enlighten it to our hearts and minds, one of the great tragedies of the church today is that many of God's people, who love the Lord, know very little about the wonderful revelation of truth He has given us in His Word.

It is well to remember that it is by His Word we receive spiritual life. "The Words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life." David tells us in his first Psalm that the blessed man is the one who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates therein day and night. Instead of seeking spectacular experiences let us read His Word. Let us study it. Let us know it. As Paul exhorts in Colossians 3:16, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."