

## 7. “TONGUES AND PROPHECY”

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I repeat ...

**The evidence** the disciples actually received Jesus' promised power of the holy Spirit on the historic Day of Pentecost (DoP) was not the strange wind, or the fiery tongues sitting on each head in the upper room, nor was it that the disciples were given the ability to speak with “other languages” never before learned; no, it was not even the combination of all three miracles.

Those outward manifestations of the Spirit's coming upon the disciples were certainly mighty aids to the main thing --- which was to get the power to **be witnesses** for Christ in all the world (Lk. 24: 48; Acts 1: 8). The main thing was to fulfil the Great Commission.

They were to preach the message of **repentance and forgiveness in the name of Christ among all the nations** with **power from on high** (Lk. 24: 47, 49). The main thing was to bring “the lost” to allegiance to Christ. The main thing that happened on the DoP was the disciples received the holy boldness to share Christ effectively, the power to persuade others about Jesus, the power to “win souls” for the Kingdom.

Everything else was secondary. Everything else contributed to that one unchanging constant --- confident testimony, the irrepressible witness to the truth of the Gospel of Christ. Filled with the holy Spirit they couldn't stop talking about Jesus and his Lordship. ( <sup>1</sup> )

And the world could not resist the appeal of these holy Spirit-fired-up men and women. They were turned from cowards hiding behind locked doors for fear into those who **turned the world upside down** for the Lord wherever they went (Acts 17:6).

On the DoP the disciples boldly declared **the wonderful works of God** in **other languages** never before learned by the speakers. The result was that multitudes were convicted of their sins, repented, believed the Gospel message, and were baptised. The **same day about three thousand were added**, and there followed great joy as **the Lord added to their number those who were being saved** (Acts 2: 11, 41, 47).

Without that inspired preaching of the Good News, the DoP would have been like throwing petrol on a spark where all you get is a brilliant flash for a moment with no lasting effect --- except perhaps, a few singed hairs!

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<sup>1</sup> Significantly, in Eph. 5: 18f we learn that being **filled with the Spirit** results in inspirational speech including **psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs** [songs with a spiritual message!] There's always intelligible content to the Spirit's inspiration!

Speaking in *other languages* was not the main thing! The main thing was that people heard in their own *native dialects* in order to intelligently respond to the Gospel (Acts 2: 11). ( <sup>2</sup> )

## ‘TONGUES’ AND PROPHECY ARE VIRTUALLY SYNONYMOUS!

Let’s put this in a slightly different way.

Peter understood their speaking in *other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance* was in fact, “*prophesying*” --- i.e. inspired preaching. He explained the phenomenon this way;

*But this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel ... I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy ... in those days I will pour out My Spirit, and they shall prophesy ... (Acts 2: 17-18).*

Let us get this fact firmly in mind. For Peter, the miraculously given foreign *languages* on the DoP were evidence of *prophesying*. ( <sup>3</sup> ) There was *prophetic content* to the languages. Which is to say, the “tongues” were not ecstatic heavenly tongues of angels. The “tongues” were not private prayer languages. They were a prophetic gift, and the means to an end, because they conveyed vital Gospel information via public declaration.

On that historic day Peter defined the gift of speaking in *other languages as prophecy*. And it was defined as prophecy because it was inspired speech publicly declaring *the mighty acts of God* which was understood by the audience. ***“Tongues” understood and “prophecy” are essentially the same thing!***

Come to think of it, when the Spirit “fell upon”, “came upon” or “moved upon” anybody in the Old or New Testaments, the one unchanging sign of the Spirit’s fullness was “prophesying” --- inspired speech to utter God’s message intelligently. ( <sup>4</sup> )

We have already noted that of the *six times the Book of Acts* uses the phrase *filled with the holy Spirit*, and of the *four times* it uses the similar expression *full of the Spirit*, in the verses that immediately follow, we are specifically told they spoke the word of God with joyful effectiveness. In fact, in nine of those *ten times* we are specifically told that many people turned to Christ because of their Spirit-filled witness! ( <sup>5</sup> )

The Bible teaches that what comes out of the mouth issues from the overflow of the heart. When we are full of fun, full of joy, we laugh out loud.

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<sup>2</sup> In our last article we noted that on rare occasions God has given some the ability to deliver His Gospel in a previously unlearned foreign language to needy folks who did not speak the native language of the one doing the preaching. I have no doubt the Living God has given this ability on rare occasions throughout history and can still do it today if needed. But to make speaking in “*other tongues*” to be *the sign* of the baptism in the holy Spirit is to put the cart before the horse.

<sup>3</sup> There often are two components to prophecy ... predicting the future and inspirational application of those events. Both aspects occurred on the DoP, for Joel’s prophecy of future events now happening was being explained and applied by Peter’s preaching.

<sup>4</sup> The oft-repeated OT assertion is that when the Spirit came upon So-and-So they “prophesied” and spoke the “word of the LORD”. Pick any prophet from the OT!

<sup>5</sup> The one exception is Acts 13: 52 where the disciples at Antioch *were filled with joy, and with the holy Spirit*. The reasonable conclusion is that because they were filled with the joy of the Spirit that they could not contain it and therefore were able to witness to Christ mightily. See the article in this series *Why Pentecost?* for a discussion of those ten times.

When we are full of fear, full of doubt, we complain out loud.  
When we are full of sorrow, we cry aloud. And ...

**When the Spirit fills you, you will open your mouth for Christ!**

## THE SECOND CASE OF 'TONGUES' IN ACTS ... CORNELIUS.

The second recorded instance of speaking in “tongues” is found in **Acts 10** when Peter preached to the household of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, who commanded **the Italian Cohort (Acts 10:1); ( <sup>6</sup> ) ( <sup>7</sup> )**

While Peter was still speaking, the holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptising these people who have received the holy Spirit just as we have?” So he ordered them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ ... (vs. 44-48)

About eight years had already passed since the DoP, yet it took a special vision and an angelic visitor to convince Peter to go to preach in the house of a Gentile. Peter was accompanied by six other Jewish believers who played a key role in verifying what eventuated on this historic “Pentecost of the Gentile world” --- the day salvation came to Cornelius’ household.

Peter had no sooner started his message (he himself says he was just beginning to really “get wound up“ into his Gospel sermon (**Acts 11: 15**)) when God Himself interrupted proceedings! Peter had just announced **forgiveness of sins** through the Name of Jesus whom God had raised up and made **Lord of all**, when **the holy Spirit fell on those who heard this word (Acts 10: 43-44)**.

Evidently this was fantastic news and hit Cornelius’ household like a well-aimed thunderbolt from heaven. Peter and the other six Jews with him were **astounded that the gift of the holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues (glossa) and extolling God (v.46)**.

It was a common Jewish dictum in those days that, **“The Holy Spirit never falls on a Gentile”!** But the evidence could not be denied. God poured out His Spirit on those newly converted Gentile believers in Christ, **as on us at the beginning (Acts 11: 15)**. So exactly what was it that convinced the Jews and Peter that Cornelius had received **the gift of the holy Spirit?**

After all, this was not exactly like the first DoP was it? For starters, there is no record of any strange wind or of any flaming tongues of fire as happened at Pentecost. So, how did they

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<sup>6</sup> Latin would have been the main language of these soldiers who belonged to **the Italian Cohort**.

<sup>7</sup> Cornelius’ household certainly included his nearest of kin, but also probably his servants and even possibly some of the soldiers under his command may have also been present to hear Peter’s sermon.

know Cornelius and his house had received the holy Spirit? Ah, you say, it must have been the miraculous languages for we do read of **languages** being spoken to **magnify God!**

Surely, that's our answer. The thing that convinced Peter was the gift of supernaturally inspired languages as per the DoP? Yes, it was "the gift of tongues" that convinced Peter and the Jews that salvation had come to Cornelius? Whoa!

I hate to pull on the reins and stop the coach, but let's steady up for a moment!

Let's read carefully what is said and what is **not** said. First, we are **not** told whether the languages Peter and the Jewish witnesses heard were indeed supernaturally given (as per the DoP). I know that's how we probably have traditionally read it, given that the text says **the holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning (Acts 11: 15).**

But the careful reader will observe the slight --- but significant --- difference between what is recorded about the **languages** as defined in **Acts chapter two** and those recorded here in **chapter ten**. The "tongues" on the DoP were indeed a miracle for, **the Spirit gave the ability** to speak in previously unlearned foreign languages to an audience composed of Jews and proselytes from all over the Empire. Those languages are described as **other languages (2: 4)**, which are further defined as **native languages [or dialects] (2: 6,8).**

However, at Cornelius' house, the record simply states that the Jews heard these newly-saved Gentiles **speaking in languages and extolling God**. Note what is **not** said here. It does **not** say Cornelius and the others were **speaking other languages** --- just that more than one language was being spoken.

In case you are thinking I am straining at a gnat here, allow me to quote no less an authority than, **The Expositor's Greek Testament; Here no speaking in different languages is meant ... The words of ver. 47 need not mean that this gift of tongues was manifested precisely as the Pentecostal gift.** <sup>8</sup>

In other words, to jump to the conclusion that these languages were also supernaturally bestowed languages as per the DoP is not at all stated. They may well have been the usual *languages already in use in Cornelius' home* and by his servants and soldiers. All we can say with certainty is that these new Gentile believers were **magnifying ( <sup>9</sup> ) God in languages**, however many the plural may suggest.

There is nothing in the text to suggest more than that! They were probably speaking in their usual Latin and Greek, and the servants were probably locals who spoke Aramaic, not

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<sup>8</sup> Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, M.A., LL.D, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Vol. 2, 1956, p 262 [My bold and underlined emphases]

<sup>9</sup> *Megaluno* ... "magnify" is used elsewhere in **Acts** of people magnifying the apostles (**5:13**), and of Jews and Greeks magnifying the name of the Lord Jesus (**19:17**). Dr. Luke also uses the same word when Mary magnifies the LORD God before her cousin Elizabeth (**Lk. 1: 46**), and of Elizabeth's relatives who heard how the LORD had magnified His mercy to Elizabeth and Zacharias (**Lk. 1: 58**). Once in the Gospel of **Matthew** it is used by Jesus of hypocrites who loved to magnify --- or enlarge --- the fringes on their garments for a good show before others (**Matt. 23:5**). Judging by these usages of "magnify" we can safely say Cornelius and the others were **magnifying God** before Peter and the others. Strictly speaking then, those who are said to **magnify God** are not usually addressing God Himself. When that happens other words for prayer and worship and praise are used.

to mention the other rather large number of foreign servants needed to run such a large Latin Cohort and cosmopolitan household.

Furthermore, observe carefully another difference between this “Gentile Pentecost” and the first Pentecost in Jerusalem. This time it was not the disciples and apostles who spoke in **other languages**. This time it was **the audience** who listened to Peter’s sermon who were speaking with various languages! This time it was the newly converted Gentile believers who magnified God for His great salvation. This time the order of the languages was **reversed** from that which happened at Pentecost.

As soon as Peter and the other Jews heard Cornelius and his household **magnifying God** for His great salvation in Christ, they needed no further evidence to prove that **God had also granted repentance to life to the Gentiles and that they too had received the gift of the holy Spirit (Acts 10: 45; 11: 18)**.

The important thing is that the languages on both days conveyed content which was understood by the listeners standing by. Certainly Peter and the six other Jews present understood the Spirit-filled testimony in Cornelius’ house, for they heard the Gentiles **speaking with languages and magnifying God (10: 46)**.

The proof the holy Spirit was given to Cornelius and his household was not because their “Gentile Pentecost” had a strange wind, or flaming tongues of fire sitting over their heads or that they spoke in **other** previously unlearned languages **as on us at the beginning**. Not at all!

The proof of the holy Spirit’s coming upon them was that they now gave evidence of genuine repentance, believing in the name of Christ. The proof was that they were **magnifying God in languages** which conveyed this reality --- as the text clearly states **(Acts 11: 17-18)**! As on the DoP there was an intimate connection between languages and inspired (i.e. in-spirited!) speech. That was the main thing!

#### **WHAT COURAGE THE SPIRIT GAVE CORNELIUS!**

Stop and consider the serious implications this bold confession by Cornelius and his household entailed. Remember that it had been the Roman governor **Pontius Pilate**, and that it had been *Roman soldiers* who had crucified this very Jesus whom Cornelius and his Roman household were now giving their allegiance to! Even **Pontius Pilate** knew that to spare Jesus the King of Israel was to disavow allegiance to Caesar!

Cornelius’ confession of allegiance to Christ as **Lord of all (Acts 10: 36)** quite conceivably would have been seen as treason --- betrayal of his own oath of allegiance to Imperial Rome! What courage it surely needed.

Paul wrote that we are **to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed; and that no one can confess that Jesus is the Lord, but by the holy Spirit (I Cor. 12: 3-4)**.

These Gentiles had received the gift of the holy Spirit too! They were confessing the Lordship of Jesus. Who could deny their testimonies were being uttered by the power of the holy Spirit and that they were thus saved? Water for baptism was immediately sought.

Some would like to teach that these Gentile converts spoke in “new” tongues as evidence they were filled with the holy Spirit. It should be clear this is reading into the text what’s just not there. All we are told is they glorified God in a number of languages which probably reflected the multicultural nature of the audience.

In conclusion to the story of Cornelius, let’s not forget the very practical reason for God’s sovereign hand in all of this. Remember how Peter and his Jewish friends were later called before the elders and the other apostles in Jerusalem to answer why they had visited Cornelius and baptised his house; “**Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them**” (Acts 11: 3)?

The fact that God had given the uncircumcised Gentiles the gift of the holy Spirit just as he had to them on the DoP was enough to convince them that **God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life (Acts 11: 18)**. Cornelius’ Spirit-filled testimony was proof.

#### THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN THE BAPTIST AT EPHESUS in ACTS 19: 1-6.

There is not enough space to completely unpack the third recorded time in Acts when new converts to Christ are said to have had **the holy Spirit come upon them** with the result that **they spoke with languages and prophesied (Acts 19: 6)**. I will let another speak;

Was this speaking in tongues in Acts 19 miraculous? I do not know. You do not know. The Bible simply does not say. They spoke with more than one language and prophesied. That is all the Scripture says in Acts 19:6. It may have been a supernatural gift of tongues, but the Bible does not say so. None of us has the right to say dogmatically what the Bible does not say ... [but] when they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to witness and prophesy for the Lord, they spoke in various languages. More than that we cannot say. <sup>10</sup>

Which is to say, we cannot teach that the evidence of being filled with the Spirit will be speaking in the “tongues of angels” or praying in “a heavenly prayer language”. That question must wait until we get to the **First Book of Corinthians**.

However, on the three historic occasions where “languages” are mentioned in Acts in connection with receiving the Spirit, we conclude they were given in the context of very practical purposes for testimony and to witness before other people. The “tongues” were ***always addressed to men*** and *always* in the context of evangelism so that the Great Commission would be fulfilled in all the world.

That is, on these three occasions when the Spirit came upon people and “tongues” are specifically mentioned, we are also told that prophecy --- empowered language --- went

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<sup>10</sup> John R. Rice, *The Power of Pentecost or The Fullness of the Spirit*, SLP, Murfreesboro, TN, 1976, p225

alongside: We hear them always **declaring the mighty works of God** for the benefit of others standing nearby (Acts 2: 11; 10: 46; 19: 6).

We can also say with certainty that, on only one of the three historic occasions is it definitely stated that speaking in unlearned foreign languages was miraculously given by the Spirit. On the other two occasions --- in Cornelius' case and at Ephesus --- they may have simply spoken in their usual and natural languages. But the important and main thing is that they always proclaimed with a holy and joyful boldness for Christ so that others in the audience understood and could profit from such preaching. That is always the evidence that anyone was filled with the power of the holy Spirit.

### MORE CONFIRMATION

Outside these three times in the recorded history of Acts where people are said to be initially "filled with the Spirit" there is no mention of speaking with other "tongues". In fact, there are many times in the Bible where people filled with the holy Spirit did not speak in languages --- there was no practical purpose to do so! This is where the argument that the evidence of the Spirit's fullness will always be seen in the ability to speak in "other" or in "new tongues" falls down. A couple of examples:-

**John the Baptist**, filled with the Spirit, did not speak in other "tongues". In fact, he was filled with the holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel he shall turn to the LORD their God (Lk. 1: 15-16). The same phrase --- **filled with the holy Spirit** --- indicates John had the same enduement the disciples received on the DoP. The evidence of John's being filled with the Spirit was that he turned many to God. He was, if you like, a real "soul-winner"! So, speaking in tongues was not the evidence of the fullness of the Spirit in John's case.

**Jesus** was filled with the holy Spirit *for the first time* at his baptism. The holy Spirit descended upon him in a bodily form like a dove. This is exactly the same language when the Spirit "fell upon" the disciples at Pentecost, or descended upon Cornelius, or suddenly came upon the disciples at Ephesus. Following his official anointing in the Jordan River we are told Jesus was **full of the holy Spirit** and went forth for ministry in **the power of the Spirit into Galilee** (Lk. 4: 1, 14).

Jesus is our perfect example and model. He commanded his disciples to wait for the same fullness to do the same works he had done as they carried out his Great Commission. But there is not a word about Jesus speaking in other languages nor that he even promised the apostles they would get such a miraculous gift when they were to be first filled with the holy Spirit.

**The Samaritan converts** in Acts 8: 14f are not said to have spoken in other "tongues" the first time they received the fullness of the Spirit. When Peter & John prayed that these new believers **might receive the holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not fallen upon any of them; they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus)** they **received the Spirit**. But

they did not speak in other “tongues”. That is not recorded as the evidence of the Spirit’s coming in power upon them.

The apostle Paul in Acts 9: 17 was baptised in the holy Spirit for *the first time*. Ananias laid hands on him and prayed, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the holy Spirit.” This is when Paul received his commission to take the Gospel to the world. The same phrase, filled with the holy Spirit, as was used for the empowering of the disciples on the DoP is used (Acts 2:4). ( <sup>11</sup> )

Yes, throughout the Bible many are said to have been filled with the holy Spirit but in no other example outside of the DoP, Cornelius and the disciples at Ephesus, is there any mention of speaking in “tongues”. To make the case even more compelling, the cases just listed above are said to be the *first time* the recipients were filled with the Spirit.

I therefore have no mandate to say the Bible teaches that the evidence of being filled with the holy Spirit is that every believer must give evidence of it by speaking in “tongues”. The only thing I have the mandate to say is that when you and I are full of the holy Spirit *we will open our mouths for Jesus with joyful and convincing testimony so that others can understand!*

Other attributing and accompanying manifestations there may be. Acts tells us that one time there was a strange sound like a mighty rushing wind with strange fiery tongues, and the ability to speak unlearned foreign languages. Next time the place was shaken before they preached. Another time a man was healed and put his faith in Christ for salvation. Still another time, an enemy of the Gospel was struck blind to remove him from stopping others trusting in Christ. And so forth. But such “support acts” are variable and *ad hoc*.

Yes, sometimes miracles may be necessary to give greater support to the spoken word of the Gospel. They are contingent upon any number of variables. But the one unchanging evidence of the fullness of the holy Spirit *was and always is* a confident witness, a powerful testimony as to what God has done in our lives through His transforming word of the Gospel, so that others may understand and be convinced and want to give their allegiance to Christ Jesus.

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<sup>11</sup> It will be objected, “But doesn’t Paul say in I Corinthians 14: 18, “I thank God I speak in “tongues” more than you all”? Yes he does. But we will treat this when we come to that matter in later articles. Patience!



