

Speaking in Tongues

Understanding this subject involves three primary points, discussed below.

1. **The meaning of “tongues,”** which simply means *language* (ex., English tongue). The miracle called “tongues” was the ability to speak a human language never studied or learned. By this, God “gave witness” that the speaker was telling genuine, divine truth (Hebrews 2:4).

It is tragic that today “tongue-speaking” is often associated with wild antics, unintelligible speeches, and appeals for money attributed to the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, when the apostles spoke in tongues, the hearers said, “We hear them speaking in our own tongues...” (2:11)—no one says that today when hearing someone claiming to speak in tongues. In the Bible, the speaker knew what he was saying and could control whether he would speak or be silent. Those who spoke a language not known by any of the hearers and did not use an interpreter sinned (1 Cor. 14:4, 32, 28). One way modern claims of tongue-speaking are proven false is by comparing the speaker’s teachings with the Bible. The Holy Spirit leads no one to teach salvation without or before water baptism (Acts 2:36-38; 8:29, 35-38).

2. **“Tongues” given by apostle’s hands** The ability to speak in tongues is listed among many other miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10). These gifts were received when one of the apostles laid their hands on someone. In Acts 8, Philip went to Samaria, performed miracles, and preached Christ. As a result, men and women believed and were baptized, but the Holy Spirit fell *upon none of them* (v14, 16). Philip performed miracles but could not give, nor did baptism give, the Samaritans that ability. Two apostles came from Jerusalem, and *they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit* (v17). This is one reason no one is genuinely speaking in tongues today--- there are no apostles to distribute this gift, or the others. Some people wonder if, or assert that, the Holy Spirit will directly give these gifts today, citing Cornelius, who spoke in tongues before his conversion. Acts 10:44-45; 11:3, 17-18 shows that this miracle was to convince the Jews that God accepted the Gentiles (which the Jews doubted). What happened in Acts 10 was as unique as what happened in Acts 2:1-4, making it clear that the gospel was truly for all men.

3. **How God reveals truth** To understand “speaking in tongues,” you must understand God’s plan for revealing truth. When God revealed truth, He let a miracle prove the words were from Him. In Matthew 9:1-8, a miracle proved that Jesus was speaking truth.

Read Hebrews 2:1-4. Verse 3 reminds us that Jesus’ words are true, but how do we know His words are true? Verse 4 says that God was “bearing witness” by various miracles. Miracles were the way that God showed that the words of Jesus and the apostles were true. That is what happened in Acts 2—since the audience knew God gave the apostles the power to speak in those languages (tongues), they also knew God approved of what they taught. Speaking in tongues was a piece of evidence that the apostles’ message was true.

Today, the Bible records the words and miracles of Jesus and His apostles so we know what is right and have the evidence proving it is true. God is not giving new teachings or new evidence today. He has completed His plan for revealing and “bearing witness” to truth. Since we need no new message or evidence, tongue-speaking has ceased.

Send us your comments or questions on this topic, so together we can search the Scriptures whether these things are so and understand what the will of the Lord is (Acts 17:11; Eph. 5:17).