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MINISTRIES

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Speaking in Tongues Part 3: FAQ

The spiritual gift of “speaking in tongues” is a controversial and highly debated topic. What does the Bible say about this phenomenon? That is the question we have been examining in this series.

In parts 1 and 2 of this series, we explored the nature of tongues and the relevance of tongues-speaking for today.

What is the nature of tongues? In part 1, we argued that speaking in tongues refers to the Spirit-enabled ability to speak previously unlearned human languages. For example, the Spirit empowers someone who knows only English to miraculously speak Japanese without ever having studied the language. The Bible does not teach that speaking in tongues means speaking ecstatic utterances. By “ecstatic utterances,” we mean the speaking of sounds that have no linguistic pattern or correspondence to any genuine human language. In the Bible, speaking in tongues means being supernaturally empowered to speak other languages you didn’t previously know.

What is the relevance of tongues-speaking for today? Well, in part 2, we argued that tongues will not “cease” until the age to come—after the Messiah returns and establishes his kingdom on earth. Contrary to what many cessationists have argued, the Bible simply does not teach that tongues-speaking would cease with the finalization of the biblical canon. The purpose of tongues-speaking is to empower believers to evangelize and to edify the body of believers. Since we should still be evangelizing and edifying the body of believers, and the gift of tongues can help us do those things, then the gift of tongues remains relevant for today.

Please review parts 1 and 2 of this series to hear the reasons and arguments that have led us to these conclusions.

In this teaching, we will do our best to answer some of your frequently asked questions concerning this topic. Let’s get started.

Am I still saved if I don't speak in tongues?

Although people who hold to this belief are in the minority, some say that speaking in tongues is a necessary sign that follows salvation. Hence, if you aren't speaking in tongues, you should question whether you are actually in the faith at all.

Where does this idea come from? Well, in the Book of Acts, we do see a couple of occasions where people who receive the Gospel immediately begin speaking in tongues (Acts 10:46; 19:6). In these instances, the fact that these people spoke in tongues is taken as evidence that they have been saved. For instance, after Peter preaches the Gospel to Cornelius and his relatives (Acts 10:34-43), the Book of Acts says the following:

Acts 10:44-46

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them **speaking in tongues** and extolling God.

Similarly, after Paul baptizes some men from Ephesus in name of Yeshua, we see again that they began speaking in tongues:

Acts 19:6

And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began **speaking in tongues** and prophesying.

However, the most that we can say from these passages is that speaking in tongues could be considered evidence that someone has been saved. These passages do not say that speaking in tongues is the *only* evidence of someone's salvation, nor do they imply that it is *necessary* evidence. These passages simply describe particular instances of people who have received the Gospel and then spoke in tongues.

How do we know that speaking in tongues is not necessary evidence of salvation? Because Scripture makes it clear that not all believers speak in tongues. This is implied in 1 Corinthians 12:

1 Corinthians 12:29-30

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all **speak with tongues**? Do all interpret?

The answer to these rhetorical questions is no. We don't all speak with tongues, just as we don't all function as apostles, prophets, teachers, and so forth. Nevertheless, we are still saved.

Additionally, when the Bible explicitly teaches how to receive salvation, it does not mention speaking in tongues. These passages say to believe that God raised the Messiah from the dead and to confess that he is Lord, and you will be saved (John 3:16-18; Romans 10:9-13; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8). They do not say, "And you will begin speaking in tongues." If speaking in tongues was a necessary sign of salvation, we would expect the biblical authors to mention it. Again, while speaking in tongues could be considered evidence that someone has been saved, the Bible does not teach that everyone who is saved will speak in tongues. In fact, far more than the gifts of the Spirit, the Bible emphasizes the *fruit* of the Spirit as being the evidence that someone is saved (Galatians 5:16-26).

For more on the topic of salvation, we recommend checking out our teaching, “[What is Salvation?](#)”

Does God intend for *all* believers to speak in tongues?

This question is related to the first one. We don’t believe that God intends all believers to speak in tongues, just like he doesn’t intend all believers to be apostles, prophets, and teachers (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).

Does Paul describe speaking in tongues in Romans 8:26-27?

Some people think that Romans 8:26-27 is a description of speaking in tongues. Here is what those verses say:

Romans 8:26-27

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

So, Paul says that the Spirit intercedes for us in prayer “[with groanings too deep for words.](#)” Some people take this as a description of tongues-speaking, and they equate this description with the ecstatic utterances that many people call “tongues” today. Again, to learn why we do not think the “tongues-speaking” in the Bible refers to ecstatic utterances, see [part 1](#) of this series.

But what about Romans 8:26-27? In context, Paul has been speaking about the suffering that we experience as believers, our hope for future glory, and the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:18-25). In fact, earlier in the passage, Paul uses Greek words that are related to the “groanings” (στεναγμός) of the Spirit in verse 26 to describe the “groaning” (συστενάζω / στενάζω) of “the whole creation” and of “we ourselves,” meaning believers (Romans 8:22-23).

It seems that when Paul speaks about the “groanings” of the Spirit, he is saying that the Spirit identifies with our pain and helps us when we are too weak to even know what to pray. According to Paul, the Spirit turns our groanings into meaningful prayers. The word translated “too deep for words” (ἀλάλητος) could simply mean “unspoken,” and that seems to be the meaning here. In the next verse, Paul speaks about God searching “hearts” and “knowing” what is in the “mind” of the Spirit, which implies that these groanings of the Spirit are inaudible and take place within the heart of a person, where the Spirit resides. Similarly, the “whole creation” does not literally groan or speak, but Paul depicts the creation as groaning for redemption just as believers are groaning for redemption. Paul seems to be saying that the Spirit identifies with our inward “groanings” and feelings and intercedes for us when we don’t know what to pray—when we can’t even speak at all. This does not seem like a description of speaking in tongues. This is a description of the Spirit identifying with our suffering and ministering to us when we’re too weak to even speak.

Is the miracle of tongues in Acts 2 a reversal of Babel?

Genesis 11 says that the people of the earth used to have one language. They decided to build a city, along with a tower that reaches the heavens so that they could make a name for themselves. In response, God confuses their language, causing them to no longer understand each other, and scatters them across the earth.

Many consider the miracle of believers speaking in tongues described in Acts 2 as a reversal of what took place in Genesis 11. In Acts 2, during Shavuot, the Holy Spirit descends upon the apostles, enabling them to speak in various languages. This ability enabled people from different nations who gathered in Jerusalem for the feast to hear the Gospel in their native tongues. While Babel represents the division and fragmentation of humanity due to their pride, Shavuot represents the restoration and unity of humanity through the Spirit and repentance. The gift of tongues brings the people together and enables them to understand each other and to unite around exalting the Messiah instead of themselves. Thus, we could see Acts 2 as a divine reversal of the linguistic confusion at Babel.

What are the “tongues as of fire” in Acts 2?

When the disciples were gathered on the day of Shavuot, Luke says that they suddenly heard a sound from heaven like a rushing wind, which filled the entire house (Acts 2:2). Then, he says that “tongues as of fire” appeared and rested on the disciples:

Acts 2:3-4

And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

So, in addition to hearing a rushing wind, the disciples saw a flashing light, which Luke describes as “tongues as of fire.” This is an idiomatic expression that appears often in Jewish literature. For instance, the Dead Sea Scrolls use this expression for the flashes of light from the Urim or Thummim on the High Priest’s breastplate. (See references in Craig Keener, *Acts: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2012), 802-803).

So, “tongues of fire” is an idiomatic expression for flashing light. Luke’s use of this expression might also be an allusion to the events of Mount Sinai. In Deuteronomy 4 and 5, which retells the events of Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses repeatedly states that YHWH spoke “from the midst of the fire” that was on top of the mountain (Deuteronomy 4:11-12, 15, 33, 36, 5:4-5, 22, 24, 26). So, fire is connected to the words spoken by God. And in Acts 2, when the tongues of fire rest upon the disciples, they are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking in tongues “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” In other words, they begin proclaiming God’s word “from the midst of the fire” that had rested upon them. It should be noted that there is a long-held tradition that God spoke his commandments—his word—on the day of Shavuot. The events of Acts 2, where the disciples proclaimed the Gospel in tongues, also happened on Shavuot.

Why did God give the apostles the ability to speak in foreign languages? Why not give foreigners the ability to speak in the apostles’ language instead?

We don't know why God chose to fulfill his purposes the way he did it. But from a narrative perspective, the message of the Book of Acts is based on the premise that the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit descends upon them. This Spirit-empowerment is what enables them to be witnesses to the end of the earth, which is what the Book of Acts is all about. Here is what Yeshua said to them prior to his ascension:

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

This promise from Yeshua is fulfilled in the next chapter of Acts when the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples and enables them to speak in tongues. Since the disciples were the ones who were promised power from the Holy Spirit, it follows that they would be the ones to receive the miraculous ability to speak in foreign languages they didn't previously know. Giving foreigners this miraculous ability instead of the disciples doesn't fit the intent of Luke's narrative.

Are ecstatic utterances connected to the “Kundalini spirit”?

Many Christians who claim to speak in tongues are actually speaking ecstatic utterances. In our opinion, when the Bible mentions believers speaking in tongues, these believers were speaking genuine human languages, not ecstatic utterances. However, even though we don't think ecstatic utterances are a biblical practice, is it wrong or pagan?

One claim that is often made is that ecstatic utterances is a manifestation of the “Kundalini spirit.” In Hinduism, “kundalini” is a type of spiritual energy that resides within every person, and it is believed that this energy is “awakened” through religious practices like yoga and meditation. Often, this awakening is accompanied by physical manifestations like convulsions or ecstatic speech.

The physical manifestations that often accompany religious experiences in Hinduism do look similar to some of the manifestations that we observe in some Christian groups that engage in ecstatic utterances. Does this mean that these Christians are being filled with the Kundalini spirit? Are they engaging in a pagan practice?

Well, not necessarily. Just because something looks similar to something else doesn't mean they are the same. For example, Paul mentions the physical manifestation of people literally falling on their faces and worshiping God when they hear prophecy and are convicted (1 Corinthians 14:25). John also speaks about the elders “falling down” to worship God and the Lamb (Revelation 5:14). However, Daniel also mentions falling down in worship in a negative way. He writes that the people “fell down” to worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up (Daniel 3:7). All of these instances include the physical manifestation of falling down in worship, but only one of these instances would be considered inappropriate. So, the act of falling down isn't the problem. The problem is the object of worship.

Similarly, Christians engaging in ecstatic utterances during their private prayer time or during a church service are not worshiping a Hindu deity. Even though they might display a physical manifestation that looks similar to what takes place in a Hindu religious service, the physical manifestation itself is not necessarily wrong. While these Christians are not practicing what the Bible calls “speaking in tongues,” their practice is harmless. It seems that it would be a problem only if it disrupted the service, which should be avoided even when someone legitimately speaks in tongues. Paul explains how the gift of

tongues should operate within the local congregation in 1 Corinthians 14. For more on that, see part 2 of this series.

If ecstatic utterances aren't what the Bible calls speaking in tongues, then what are they?

In our opinion, they are merely sounds, perhaps similar to scat singing in jazz music. For a lot of people, engaging in ecstatic utterances might serve as a form of mental relaxation, similar to humming a tune to yourself. Even though it isn't what the Bible describes as speaking in tongues, people who engage in this practice are not doing anything evil or pagan. The practice itself is morally neutral. So, if someone feels like they personally benefit from doing it, more power to them. Just don't disrupt the worship service.

If there isn't an "angelic language," then what language do the angels speak?

In part 1 of this series, we argued that Paul's reference to "tongues of angels" in 1 Corinthians 13 is not good support for the validity of ecstatic utterances, nor is it good evidence for a distinct angelic language. At best, the verse is ambiguous, as we explained in part 1. But it does raise the question: if there isn't an angelic language, then what language do the angels speak?

Whenever angels appear to people in the Bible, those people are able to understand what the angels are saying. Hence, it would seem that angels are able to speak whatever human language is needed to convey a message to their audience, whether that be Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or so forth. However, the Bible does not tell us if there is a regular language spoken by angels. Beyond the Bible, there are some early Jewish and Christian sources that identify the language of angels as Hebrew (Jubilees 12:25-27; *Apocalypse of Paul* 30). Some suggest that the universal language spoken by humanity before the Tower of Babel incident was Hebrew, and that Hebrew will be the "pure speech" that Zephaniah says will be restored to the people in the age to come (Zephaniah 3:9). If that is true, then perhaps Hebrew is the native language used by angels to communicate with each other and with God. However, the Bible doesn't give us enough information to draw a definitive conclusion.

In your teaching on the nature of tongues, you used words like "maybe," "likely," and "probable." Why is that?

The main reason for being more measured in that particular presentation is that we are not 100% confident in our conclusion. We may be wrong. Some biblical scholars make a good case for understanding tongues as a heavenly language that manifests as ecstatic utterances when spoken by believers.

In part 1 of this series, we made a case for the position that we think best accounts for all the data. However, we still admitted in that teaching that our interpretation has challenges, particularly when it comes to 1 Corinthians 14. This is a big reason why we approach this topic by using the clear description of tongues-speaking in Acts to serve as a reference point for understanding the more ambiguous passages about tongues-speaking in 1 Corinthians. Acts clearly describes tongues as human languages, but this is less clear in 1 Corinthians. Since we don't think the Bible teaches two different types of tongues-speaking, we made an effort to reconcile the descriptions of tongues in 1 Corinthians

with those in Acts and to show how 1 Corinthians is compatible with the idea that tongues are human languages.

Even though we think our reading best explains the biblical data, there is still some ambiguity in the text, and we are trying to be intellectually honest—hence, “maybe,” “likely,” and “probable.”

Why didn't people speak in tongues in the Tanakh (Old Testament)? Or did they?

There is no evidence in Scripture that anyone spoke in tongues prior to the events described in Acts 2. We suspect that it has something to do with the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. Just as the Messiah was destined to arrive at a particular time in history to redeem mankind (Galatians 4:4-5), so also God planned for the Spirit-empowered church to begin its mission as witnesses to the end of the earth at a particular time in history. The gift of tongues was part of that new phase of God's plan of salvation, which continues to this day.

Why didn't Yeshua ever speak in tongues? Or did he?

The answer to this question is the same as the previous one. There is no evidence in Scripture that Yeshua spoke in tongues during his earthly ministry. The gift of tongues seems to have been intended for carrying out the next phase of God's plan of salvation that began after Yeshua's earthly ministry. Also, Yeshua never had to speak in tongues in order to communicate to his listeners because they all spoke the same language that he did. Hence, speaking in tongues would serve no purpose in his earthly ministry.

Does the Torah give us any guidance about speaking in tongues?

The Torah does not say anything about speaking in tongues because nobody spoke in tongues prior to the events described in Acts 2. 1 Corinthians 14 is the only place in Scripture where specific guidance is given regarding speaking in tongues. For more on this, see part 2 of this series.

How do you know that the tongues-speaking in Acts is the same as that in 1 Corinthians 14? Couldn't these authors use the same word or phrase to mean different things?

Some people think that while Acts describes speaking in tongues as the Spirit-enabled ability to speak human languages that the speaker had not previously known, 1 Corinthians describes it as ecstatic utterances. It is true that the same word can often have different senses. In other words, two different authors could use the same word and mean different things by it. A good example of this is the words “faith” and “justified” in certain passages written by James and Paul. See our teaching, [“Faith and Works: Do James and Paul Disagree on Justification?”](#)

This is why the context is so important in helping us determine the precise meanings of the words being used. That said, when it comes to the description of tongues-speaking in Acts and 1 Corinthians, it is unlikely that Luke and Paul are describing different things. As we explained in part 1 of this series, Luke

was Paul's traveling companion, spent much time with Paul, and would have been familiar with Paul's experiences and theology. It stands to reason that if these two writers are using the same terminology, then they are referring to the same experience. Not only that, but while there are apparent differences in how the gift of tongues functions in the separate accounts, there are also many similar features. Both authors associate speaking in tongues with Spirit empowerment (Acts 2:4; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11) and prophecy (Acts 19:6; 1 Corinthians 14), and both characterize tongues as a type of praise (Acts 10:46; 1 Corinthians 14:14-17). If Luke and Paul were talking about two different things, why would their descriptions of those things be the same?

The next one is not a question, but it is a statement worth addressing:

You claim that what you refer to as “ecstatic utterances” is not what the Bible calls speaking in tongues, but this is only because you haven’t experienced it personally. If you had, your opinion would be different.

In response, we would point out that such a statement could potentially be reversed. One could argue that the person who believes that tongues are ecstatic utterances does so only because of their personal experiences.

It is true that our experiences or traditions can often influence how we read Scripture. This is why, at the beginning of part 1 of this series, we warned about how our experiences can shape how we read the Bible and that we can sometimes read those experiences or traditions *into* the Bible instead of letting the text speak for itself. Nobody is perfect and we all have a bias, but our presentation was our best attempt at taking the text for what it says. One can reasonably disagree with our interpretation, but merely appealing to motive or bias is not a persuasive argument.

That said, for what it's worth, I actually *was* part of a congregation that held to a certain view of speaking in tongues that I now disagree with. And, in fact, there were occasions where I spoke ecstatic utterances. So, I *have* personally experienced what many believers call “speaking in tongues.” While I am now convinced that that experience was not the same thing as what the Bible describes as speaking in tongues, I remain open to being wrong. However, one would need to demonstrate their position using Scripture.

Conclusion

There is plenty more that could be discussed regarding speaking in tongues, and we hope that this series was helpful to you as you study this topic on your own.

For other questions, you can reach us at the Contact Us page on our website (<https://119ministries.com/about-us/contact-us/>).

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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