

What Are Biblical Tongues?

**A Biblical Examination of
the Gift of Speaking in Tongues**

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Introduction:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” – 2nd Timothy 3:16

In the 21st century it is very common to run into a Christian who will tell you about their experience of “speaking in tongues,” or maybe even about a friend of theirs who told them about their experience. It is often described like a boiling over of water that begins at your toes and comes up to your head and at the moment of climax the person begins to speak in an unknown angelic language that sounds like “gibberish” to anyone else listening. This phenomenon is most commonly found among Pentecostal denominations but isn’t limited to just Pentecostals. It is believed that this “speaking in tongues” is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon that person, and that the unknown angelic language being spoken is a sign of that. I did not grow up in a Pentecostal home, or in a home that practiced “speaking in tongues.” I did grow up in a Christian home though, and my parents, their parents, and their parents were not Pentecostal, and I don’t know of one single person in my whole family that has ever spoken in an unknown tongue like portrayed in modern Pentecostalism. I have been to several churches through my life, including the one I Pastor, I could clearly feel the Spirit of God moving through some of them, yet I have never seen someone speak in tongues before. Many would say that my family and all the Churches I have been part of are devoid of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and some may even question the salvation of everyone involved because of the lack of “speaking in tongues.”

Once, when my father was a boy, he was with his mother, who was sick in the hospital. A preacher visited them, and during the visit, the subject of tongues came up. This preacher told my father with great confidence that unless he and his mother spoke in tongues, they would both burn in hell for all eternity. Is this what the Bible truly teaches? I

was first approached concerning this subject a few years ago at a Christian conference where I was preaching, and I was asked point blank if I had ever spoken in tongues. I told this person no, and I saw the shock on their face. They proceeded to tell me that they wondered if I was saved and whether or not I would be able to preach God's Word since I did not have the Holy Spirit in my life, according to them. To say I was a little surprised is an understatement. This person went on to tell me about their experience in which they spoke in an unknown angelic language in their living room. They then went on to recite what to me sounded like gibberish, which they said was an angelic language. But I don't speak in angelic tongues, so who was I to say it wasn't?

Since then, I have had several other conversations that were very similar, and others in which the person wasn't as extreme to say that I wasn't a Christian, but I could clearly tell that they looked down on myself and others like me as being spiritually inferior to themselves because we haven't "spoken in tongues." When I would tell them that I haven't spoken in tongues it is often said to me that I need to be "open" to the idea of speaking in tongues and ask God to give me the gift. Then, they say, it will happen. Several people have said this to me over the years, but I can't find these instructions in the Bible. When I tell them years later that I have been open to it, and if the Lord wants to give me this gift He can at any time, they often look down their nose at me as though I am lying, I guess, in their view, if I was truly "open" to speaking in tongues it would have happened already. This strange attitude is what inspired me to write this book, and as you will see in the following pages, this modern interpretation of "speaking in tongues" is NOT Biblical. Rather, it is based on man-made tradition. I don't say that to downplay or even reject an experience anyone says the Lord gave them, or to attack all Pentecostal-leaning Christians. The experience someone has, whether it was genuine or not, is between them and the Lord. I am very good friends with many Pentecostals, and some of them are among the finest Christians I have ever met.

The trouble I have is that I can't find the modern Pentecostal interpretation of speaking in tongues in the Bible. The Scriptures that are used to "prove" speaking in tongues is nothing but an angelic language or some kind of gibberish, or that every Christian should speak in tongues to have eternal life are taken out of context. If this doctrine of speaking in tongues is so important, and it is to take place in this age, then it should be clearly seen in Scripture, and shouldn't be based on feelings, experiences, and traditions. Rather it should be made using Scripture, and **Scripture alone**.

Chapter 1: What does “Tongues” mean in the Old Testament?

In order to properly identify what true speaking in tongues is according to Scripture, I think it would be a good idea to determine how the word “tongues” is used in Scripture. The English word “tongues” is rendered from the Greek word *glōssa*¹, and appears fifty times in our New Testament and one hundred and twelve times in the Greek Septuagint. The Septuagint (also known as the LXX) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, which was translated around two hundred years before Christ in the city of Alexandria, Egypt, and is quoted by the Apostles in the New Testament more than the Hebrew. The Septuagint is very important because it gives us context on how Greek words were used prior to the 1st century, and how the 1st century Christians would have understood those words, due to their familiarity with the Greek Scriptures. So, in the case of tongues if we want to better understand what the word *glōssa* means we need to look to the Old Testament to see how it was used there. The first time this word appears is in Genesis 10:5 and is used in speaking of known languages of man.

Genesis 10:5 (Brenton² Septuagint Translation) states:

“From these were the islands of the Gentiles (Nations) divided in their land, each according to his tongue, in their tribes and in their nations.”

Genesis 10:20 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“These are the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, and in their nations.”

¹ Strong's #1100 “γλῶσσα *glōssa*, *gloce-sah*’; of uncertain affinity; the tongue; by implication, a language (specially, one naturally unacquired):—tongue.”

² Brenton's Septuagint is a translation of the Greek Old Testament by Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, published in 1851. There is also the Charles Thomas translation (1808), the Apostolic Bible Polygot (2003), among others you can use as well.

Genesis 10:31 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.”

As you can see in these passages, the word is used obviously speaking of the languages of those people mentioned. I don't think it would be incorrect in translating this word as “languages” in these passages, and some Bible translations do translate it that way, such as the New American Standard Bible, The English Standard Version, Holman Christian Standard, the Apostolic Bible Polyglot, and even the 1526 Tyndale Bible. In chapter 11 of Genesis, we read about the Tower of Babel. This passage is universally understood to be talking about known languages of man.

Genesis 11:7 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“Come, and having gone down let us there confound their tongue, that they may not understand each the voice of his neighbour.”

We also find this word being used for known languages of man in some of the following passages:

Daniel 3:29 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“Wherefore I publish a decree: Every people, tribe, or language, that shall speak reproachfully against the God of Sedrach, Misach, and Abdenago shall be destroyed, and their houses shall be plundered: because there is no other God who shall be able to deliver thus.”

Psalms 81:5 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“He made it to be a testimony in Joseph, when he came forth out of the land of Egypt: he heard a language which he understood not.”

Isaiah 66:18 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“And I know their works and their imagination. I am going to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory.”

Isaiah 19:18 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“In that day there shall be five cities in Egypt speaking the language of Chanaan, and swearing by the name of the Lord of hosts; one city shall be called the city of Asedec.”

Jeremiah 5:15 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“Behold, I will bring upon you a nation from far, O house of Israel, saith the Lord; a nation the sound of whose language one shall not understand.”

I do not consider it Scripture, but even in the Apocryphal book of Judith, which is thought to have been written towards the later 2nd century B.C. uses this Greek word *glōssa* in the same way as the verses above speaking of known languages of man:

Judith 3:8 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“Yet he did cast down their frontiers, and cut down their groves: for he had decreed to destroy all the gods of the land, that all nations should worship Nabuchodonosor only, and that all tongues and tribes should call upon him as god.”

In addition to this word being used for known languages of man it is also used to refer to an actual tongue in the following passages:

Exodus 11:7 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“But among all the children of Israel shall not a dog snarl with his tongue, either at man or beast; that thou mayest know how wide a distinction the Lord will make between the Egyptians and Israel.”

Joshua 10:21 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“And all the people returned to the camp to Joshua at Makkedah in peace: none moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel.”

Judges 7:5 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.”

Psalms 126:2 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them.

Lamentations 4:4 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“The tongue of the sucking child cleaves to the roof of its mouth for thirst: the little children ask for bread, and there is none to break it to them.”

You have *glōssa* being used for known languages of man as well as for an actual tongue, or using it to describe the shape of something, as in Joshua 7:21, but you also have the word being used for the actions of a person’s tongue for either good or for bad.

Job 20:12 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“Though evil be sweet in his mouth, though he will hide it under his tongue.”

Psalms 5:9 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“For there is no truth in their mouth; their heart is vain; their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit.”

Psalm 10:7 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“Whose mouth is full of cursing, and bitterness, and fraud: under his tongue are trouble and pain.”

Proverbs 6:17 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“The eye of the haughty, a tongue unjust, hands shedding the blood of the just.”

Proverbs 10:31 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“The mouth of the righteous drops wisdom: but the tongue of the unjust shall perish.”

Proverbs 15:2 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“The tongue of the wise knows what is good: but the mouth of the foolish tells out evil things.”

Isaiah 3:8 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judea has fallen, and their tongues have spoken with iniquity, disobedient as they are towards the Lord.”

Isaiah 45:23 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”

As you see from the above Scriptures, *glōssa* is never used for a unknown angelic language, or to describe someone uttering words of gibberish. Rather it is used for known languages of man, an actual tongue, or to describe what a tongue can do. I of course did not list every place in Scripture where this word appears, but you can study more of these passages for yourself by looking up each Scripture where it appears by using the index in the back of this book.

Chapter 2: “Tongues” in the Book of Acts?

Now that we have looked at how the Greek word *glossa* is rendered in the Greek Old Testament, let us now examine how it is used in the New Testament. We will start in the Book of Acts in chapter 2, where we read about the Holy Spirit descending upon the Apostles at the feast of Pentecost, and how the gift of speaking in tongues came upon them.

Acts 2:1-4 states:

“And 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 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 Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

In this passage we have the word *glossa* being used two different ways. The first is in verse 3 where it says, **“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them”** which is using the word in a descriptive way. The writer is describing what these flames that sat over the Apostles looked like, which was like two tongues that were attached and separated or cloven like a hoof of a cow. This is not the first time the word *glossa* is used in this manner. We can read in Joshua chapter 7, verse 22, how it is used to describe a bar or wedge of gold.



**“The Descent of the Spirit”
by Gustave Doré (1843)**

Joshua 7:21 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“I saw in the spoil an embroidered mantle, and two hundred didrachms of silver, and one golden wedge of fifty didrachms, and I desired them and took them; and, behold, they are hid in my tent, and the silver is hid under them.”

The other way that this word is used in Acts chapter 2 is in verse 4 where it says the Apostles, **“began to speak with other tongues.”** Now up to this point in Scripture this word has only been used in this manner to mean known languages of man, never angelic languages, or gibberish. Chapter 2 of Acts confirms this is what is being spoken in the following verses:

Acts 2:5-11 states:

“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language³. And they 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, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.”

The Scripture is very clear that the languages in this passage were languages that were known to the people listening, but not known to the Apostles. In Jerusalem the main languages were Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Latin. Then you had people from Parthia who spoke

³ The English word language here is rendered from the Greek word *dialektos* which is where we get our English word “dialect” for languages of man. It is used interchangeably with *glossa* in this passage. It is Strongs #1254 and is defined as: “**δῶλεκτος dialéktos, dee-al'-ek-tos; from G1256; a (mode of) discourse, i.e. "dialect":—language, tongue.**”

Parthian, people from Media who spoke a northeastern Iranian language, people of Elam who spoke a language that is thought to not be connected to any other language group and is known as a “language isolate,” people of Mesopotamia who spoke Akkadian, people of Cappadocia who spoke Greek in several dialects, people of Egypt who spoke Coptic, and the list goes on. What the Apostles were speaking was not gibberish but known languages, which were used for a very important purpose: growing the ranks of early Christian converts. It’s also important to point out that the people **“heard them speak in his own language”**, which infers that the Apostles were speaking in their own language, and the people were hearing in their language as another possible interpretation. Now some people would object to both of these interpretations, saying that later on in the chapter the Apostles were accused of being drunk, and that if it was a known language of man, they would have recognized it as such even if they couldn’t understand what was being said.

Acts 2:12-15 states:

“And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.”

To say these people would have recognized all these different languages as real languages, which seem to all being spoken at the same time to different people is an assumption. The Scripture clearly identifies the languages being spoken as known languages of man, not an angelic language. If it was an angelic tongue, how would these people hear in their own language unless they themselves spoke an angelic tongue? What I think was happening was the accusations of the people being drunk were made towards the people in the crowd that were saying that they could hear the Apostles speaking in their own

languages, and the accusers didn't have this miracle happened to them, so they accused them of being drunk for thinking such a thing. So, you either had the Apostles speaking known languages of man, or the Apostles were speaking in their native tongue and the people heard in their own tongue. With either interpretation, it is a known language of man being spoken. Since these languages being spoken by the Apostles in Acts chapter 2 were real languages of man, then those who claim to be "Pentecostal" and take their name from this event must believe that the Apostles gift of speaking in tongues is the speaking of languages just like in the Old Testament. Let's now look at the next account of the gift of tongues in the Book of Acts.

Acts 10:22-46 states:

“And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and he had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is

Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 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 Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles (Nations) also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter,”

In this passage we have Peter who was told by God that the nations were a part of the New Covenant,⁴ and to go to Cornelius the centurion

⁴The word translated as “Gentiles” is rendered from the Greek word *Ethnos* and means nations or tribes, and one must look at the context to see what nations is being spoke about. In the context of this passage, it seems it is speaking of the Northern House of Israel because it was

and his kinsman to preach to them. Cornelius being a Roman centurion would have been multilingual, as most Romans spoke Greek and the language that the Roman army spoke was Latin. If Cornelius was stationed near Judea, he would have probably spoke Aramaic like Peter. As for the rest of Cornelius' household and kinsmen, it is unlikely they would have been so multilingual, which would explain the need for the Holy Spirit to give these people the gift of speaking in languages in order for them to understand Peter. The next time the gift of tongues appears is in Acts chapter 19 at the conversion of Apollo who lived in Corinth.

Acts 19:1-7 states:

“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.”

In this passage we have no way of knowing what languages all these twelve men spoke, so it is very possible they did not all speak the same language, and thus there was a need for this gift to come upon these men. It should also be noted that the baptism “**in the name of the Lord Jesus**” is no different than the water baptism that is spoken about in Acts 2:38.

these people, along with the House of Judah, who the New Covenant was to be made with according to Jeremiah 31:31 and Hebrews 8:8.



Adam Clarke (1762-1832) in his Bible commentary on Acts chapter 19 said this concerning the gift of tongues in this passage:

“They received the miraculous gift of different languages; and in those languages they taught to the people the great doctrines of the Christian religion; for this appears to be the meaning of the word προεφητευον, prophesied, as it is used above.”

Those are the only times the gift of tongues appears in the Book of Acts, and previously in the New Testament it was only mentioned one time in the Gospel of Mark by Jesus.

Mark 16:15-18 states:

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

The things which Jesus prophesied about in this passage happened in the Book of Acts just as He said they would, and there is no reason to think that the tongues being spoken were anything other than known languages of men being used to speak to a multilingual group in order to transmit the Gospel of Jesus Christ to scattered Israel. It is interesting to note that, in the early Pentecostal movement, they held that the gift of tongues was done in actual human languages which the speakers did not know. This understanding was later changed to mean gibberish, which they claimed was an “angelic language.”

Miss Ozman, the student in Parham's college at Topeka, who says that since January 1 she has spoken in twenty languages, testified, but mentioned no new instances on which the gift of tongues had been conferred upon her.

Rev. Mr. Parham's sister-in-law, Miss Thistlewait, who occasionally has the gift conferred upon her, was so thankful for it, because, she said, she felt nearer to the poor heathen nations when speaking in their own languages.

Newspaper clipping from The Topeka
State Journal, Topeka, Kansas,
January 31st, 1901.

prophesied. We know that at least part of the people who receive the genuine baptism speak in other tongues. Many have been understood in real earthly languages, languages which they never knew before. Then there is the unknown tongue, which no man understands, only as the spirit reveals the interpretation. We read about this in I Cor., 14th chapter. Some people believe that every person who receives the baptism of the Holy Ghost will speak in either some other known language, or else in the unknown heavenly tongue, at some time

Newspaper clipping from The Salvation
Messenger Sabetha, Kansas,
September 1st, 1916.

Chapter 3: “Tongues” in the Epistle to the Corinthians?

Except for the Book of Acts and briefly in the Gospel of Mark, the only other place that the gift of tongues is mentioned is in the Epistle to the Corinthians written by the Apostle Paul.

1st Corinthians 12:1-11 states:

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles (nations), carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.”

We still do not have any reason to believe that these “**divers kinds of tongues**” are anything other than the gift of being able to speak in known languages of men, of which that person had no prior knowledge. Consider what “tongues” has meant up to this point, the fact that Paul says there are different types of tongues would imply that it is speaking of languages of man. We have no way of knowing if there is more than one “angelic” language in existence, or if angels have a spoken language of their own. The Bible does not say.

In this passage Paul also makes a distinction between the gift of tongues, and the gift of interpretation of tongues. Now if we are to interpret the usage of the word *glossa*, which is rendered as “tongues”, to just mean languages, then this would mean this was the gift of interpreting the language that was being spoken by the person who was speaking with the gift of languages. Paul goes on to say the following later in the chapter:

1st Corinthians 12:28-30 states:

“And 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.”

Paul doesn’t seem to hold the view that everyone in the Church should speak in tongues as some Pentecostals do today. If he did, he would be encouraging everyone in Corinth to pray for the gift of tongues, and if they have not received it yet to “just be open to the idea” of receiving it.

John Gill (1697-1771) in his Bible commentary concerning 1st Corinthians 12:10 wrote the following:

“To another divers kinds of tongues; whereby such could speak all manner of languages, which they had never learned, understood, and been used to: this Christ promised his disciples, when he sent them into all the world to preach the Gospel, Mark 16:16 and so anticipates an objection they otherwise might have made, how they should be able to preach it to all, so as to be



understood, when they were not acquainted with the languages of all nations; an instance of which we have in the apostles on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:4 and which continued many years after with them, and other persons in the churches. To another the interpretation of tongues; one that had this gift, when a discourse was delivered in an unknown tongue, used to stand up and interpret it to the people, without which it could be of no use to them; and sometimes a person was gifted to speak in an unknown tongue, and yet was not capable of interpreting his discourse truly and distinctly in that the people understood.”

In 1st Corinthians, chapter 13, we have Paul mentioning tongues again while trying to teach the people of Corinth that unless they have love for one another, they truly don't have anything. Keep in mind that the old English word charity used in the King James means love.

1st Corinthians 13:1-8 states:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.”

It is from this passage, and this passage alone, that we get the supposed doctrine of “angelic” tongues being one of the tongues that

one can speak when they speak in tongues. From misunderstanding this passage, we have Churches full of people screaming complete gibberish calling it the gift of tongues and “an angelic language.” But Paul is using a hyperbolic statement or a figure of speech when he refers to the tongue of angels. In verse 2 Paul goes on to say, **“though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains.”** Are we to believe Paul understood all mysteries? Are we to believe Paul had all knowledge, i.e. was omniscient⁵? Did Paul remove a literal mountain? No. He was using figures of speech in order to teach that Christians need to have love, and that is the same thing he was doing when he mentions the tongues of angels⁶.



The reformer John Calvin in his commentary on 1st Corinthians 13:1 said the following:

“If should speak with the tongues of men. He begins with eloquence, which is, it is true, an admirable gift, considered in itself, but, when apart from love, does not recommend a man in the estimation of God. When he speaks of the tongue of angels, he uses a hyperbolic expression to denote what is singular, or distinguished. At the same time, I explain it rather as referring to the diversity of languages, which the Corinthians held in much esteem.”

Lastly, we have 1st Corinthian chapter 14, which Paul dedicates almost the whole chapter to tongues. Up to this point we have no

⁵ Webster 1828 Dictionary defines Omniscient as: **“Having universal knowledge or knowledge of all things; infinitely knowing; all-seeing.”**

⁶ It is worth noting that in the Bible, angels always spoke with people in the people’s own language. The angel & Hagar in Genesis 16, the angels and Lot in Genesis 19, the angel and Mary in Matthew 1, the angel and Zacharias in Luke 1, and the angel and Philip in Acts 8 just as a few examples.

Scriptural reason to think that the gift of tongues is anything other than the miraculous gift of being able to speak a known language of man, which previously you were not able to.

1st Corinthians 14:1-2 states:

“Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy. For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.”

In this passage Paul continues his thoughts on charity (love) and says he would rather the people of Corinth prophecy, rather than speak in an unknown tongue. The word prophecy or prophesieth does not always mean someone who foretells the future. As you read on in this chapter you will see that a person who brings edification, exhortation of the Scriptures, and comfort to the Church has the gift of prophecy. It is also important to note that the word unknown is in italics in the King James Translation which means it was added by the translators for context. The original manuscript did not say “unknown tongue,” although that is what is implied in the context of the passage. The question to be asked is, is this an “angelic” tongue being spoken about here? Some would say it is since the passage says “...**For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God...**”, and they would reason that only God can understand an angelic tongue. The problem about this view, is what about angels? Could angels not understand their own tongue? I hope they would. If not, it wouldn’t be an angelic language.

What I believe was going on in Corinth was, people were standing up before the congregation speaking or possibly reading in a language that no one else could understand. Either by the miracle of tongues, or by tongues they already knew. Much like you see in Roman Catholicism today where the Catholic priest stands up and reads in Latin to a congregation that does not know the language. Corinth was mainly a Greek-speaking city, so it is possible some people were

reading the Hebrew Scriptures out loud to a group of people who did not understand the tongue/language, much like the Hebrew Scriptures were read in Judean synagogues. Adam Clarke in his commentary on this passage gives remarks of John Lightfoot (1602-1675) concerning his thoughts on what Paul was speaking about:

“It is not likely that the Holy Spirit should, in the church, suddenly inspire a man with the knowledge of some foreign language, which none in the church understood but himself; and lead him to treat the mysteries of Christianity in that language, though none in the place could profit by his teaching. Dr. Lightfoot’s mode of reconciling these difficulties is the most likely I have met with. He supposes that by the unknown tongue the Hebrew is meant, and that God restored the true knowledge of this language when he gave the apostles the gift of tongues. As the Scriptures of the Old Testament were contained in this language, and it has beauties, energies, and depths in it which no verbal translation can reach, it was necessary, for the proper elucidation of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, and the establishment of the Christian religion, that the full meaning of the words of this sacred language should be properly understood. And it is possible that the Hebrew Scriptures were sometimes read in the Christian congregations as they were in the Jewish synagogues; and if the person who read and understood them had not the power and faculty of explaining them to others, in vain did he read and understand them himself. And we know that it is possible for a man to understand a language, the force, phraseology, and idioms of which he is incapable of explaining even in his mother tongue. We shall see, in the course of these notes, how this view of the subject will apply to the illustration of the apostle’s words throughout the chapter.”



1st Corinthians 14:3-6 states:

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that ye all spake with tongues but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying. Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?”

Paul is saying that a foreign/unknown language being spoken to a group of people who do not know it will profit and edify only the person who is speaking or reading because they (and God) are the only ones who understand what is being said. But one who prophesieth, which is the ability to give edification, exhortation from the Scriptures, comfort, and interpretation of what the Scriptures mean, is of much greater value than just an unknown language being spoken out loud to a Church who doesn't understand it.

1st Corinthians 14:6-9 states:

“And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, 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.”

Paul is now comparing language being spoken to an unlearned ear as music that is not properly being played. A guitar that is just being strummed on by a two-year-old is not music. The result is the same for a person who is listening to an unknown language that they don't understand. It won't bring about edification, exhortation from the Scriptures, and comfort to those listening. Also, when Paul says Christians should **“utter by the tongue words easy to be**

understood,” that is not being done within some Pentecostal churches where it is not uncommon to see someone roll around on the floor speaking gibberish and calling it “angelic” language. These actions are not easy to understand.



Matthew Henry (1662-1714) in his commentary wrote the following on this passage:

“In this paragraph he goes on to show how vain a thing the ostentation of speaking unknown and unintelligible language must be. It was altogether unedifying and unprofitable (1 Cor. 14:6): If I come to you speaking with tongues, what will it profit you, unless I speak to you by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? It would signify nothing to utter any of these in an unknown tongue. An apostle, with all his furniture, could not edify, unless he spoke to the capacity of his hearers. New revelations, the most clear explications of old ones, the most instructive discourses in themselves, would be unprofitable in a language not understood. Nay, interpretations of scripture made in an unknown tongue would need to be interpreted over again, before they could be of any use. I. He illustrates this by several allusions. 1. To a pipe and a harp playing always in one tone. Of what use can this be to those who are dancing? If there be no distinction of sounds, how should they order their steps or motions? Unintelligible language is like piping or harping without distinction of sounds: it gives no more direction how a man should order his conversation than a pipe with but one stop or a harp with but one string can direct a dancer how he should order his steps.”

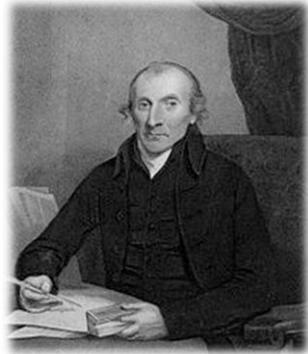
1st Corinthians 14:9-11 states:

“There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the

meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.”

Paul is using the Greek word *phōnē*⁷ here, which is rendered as voice. This word is speaking of the sound that comes out of our mouth and is also used in the Greek language to denote speaking a language. Paul says in this passages that there are “**many kinds of voices in the world,**” which would imply that he is speaking of known languages of men within the world. Paul also uses the word Barbarian as an example of someone speaking to a person who doesn’t understand their language. The term Barbarian was used by the Greeks for anyone who did not speak the Greek language, and then later on was picked up by others to mean anyone who did not speak their language.

Joseph Benson (1749-1821) in his commentary wrote the following concerning the word Barbarian and its use by the Apostle Paul:



“I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian — What I say will appear unintelligible jargon; and he a barbarian unto me — We shall be incapable of holding any conversation with each other. “The Greeks, after the custom of the Egyptians, mentioned by Herodotus, lib. 2., called all those barbarians who did not speak their language. In process of time, however, the Romans, having subdued the Greeks, delivered themselves by force of arms from that opprobrious appellation, and joined the Greeks in calling all barbarians who did not speak either the Greek or the Latin language. Afterward, the word barbarian signified any one who spake a language which another

⁷ Strongs #5456 defined as: “φωνή *phōnē*, fo-nay’; probably akin to G5316 through the idea of disclosure; a tone (articulate, bestial or artificial); by implication, an address (for any purpose), saying or language:—noise, sound, voice.”

did not understand. Thus the Scythian philosopher, Anacharsis, said, that among the Athenians, the Scythians were barbarians; and among the Scythians, the Athenians were barbarians. This is the sense of the word barbarian in this passage.”

1st Corinthians 14:12-19 states:

“Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, 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.”

When Paul says “**I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all**” he is acknowledging that he is fluent in many languages, which should be to no surprise considering he was well educated within the Pharisees, or these were given to him by the Holy Spirit.

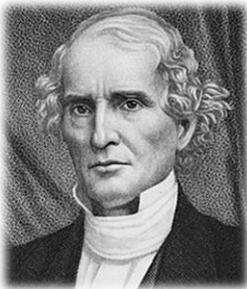
1st Corinthians 14:20-22 states:

“**Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. 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.”

In this passage Paul is referring to Isaiah 28:9-13 which is speaking of the House of Judah's captivity in Babylon, and how they would learn a lesson and be punished at the hands of foreigners who spoke a language the Judahites did not know.

Isaiah 28:9-13 (Brenton Septuagint Translation) states:

“To whom have we reported evils? and to whom have we reported a message? even to those that are weaned from the milk, who are drawn from the breast. Expect thou affliction on affliction, hope upon hope: yet a little, and yet a little, by reason of the contemptuous words of the lips, by means of another language: for they shall speak to this people, saying to them, This is the rest to him that is hungry, and this is the calamity: but they would not hear. Therefore the oracle of God shall be to them affliction on affliction, hope on hope, yet a little, and yet a little, that they may go and fall backward; and they shall be crushed and shall be in danger, and shall be taken.”



Albert Barnes (1798-1870) wrote in his commentary the following concerning this passage in Isaiah and 1st Corinthians:

“This verse is to be understood as a response to what the complaining and dissatisfied people had said, as expressed in the previous verse. God says that he will teach them, but it should be by another tongue - a foreign language in a distant land. Since they refused to hearken to the messages which he sent to them, and which they regarded as adapted only to children, he would teach them in a manner that should be “much more” humiliating; he would make use of the barbarous language of foreigners to bring them to the true knowledge of God. With stammering lips - Here it means in a foreign or barbarous tongue; and the sense is, that the lessons which God wished to teach would be conveyed to them through the

language of foreigners - the Chaldeans. They should be removed to a distant land, and there, in hearing a strange speech, in living long among foreigners, they should learn the lesson which they refused to do when addressed by the prophets in their own land.... that God would teach the rebellious and refractory Jews submission to himself, by punishing them amidst a people of another language, by removing them to a land - the land of Chaldea - where they would hear only a language that to them would be unintelligible and barbarous. Yet, notwithstanding this discipline, they would be still, to some extent, a rebellious people. The passage in Isaiah has no reference to the miraculous gift of tongues. and cannot have been used by the apostle as containing any intimation that such miraculous gifts would be imparted. It seems to have been used by Paul, because the “words” which occurred in Isaiah would “appropriately express” the idea which he wished to convey...”

What Paul is saying, is if you read and speak in languages that those in the Church do not understand and impose it upon them, it is like when the House of Judah went into captivity and was forced by God to listen to the foreign or barbarous tongues of the Babylonians as their punishment. Paul was simply using this passage in Isaiah to make a point and teach those in Corinth how to best edify the congregation with the Word of God.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I believe it is very clear from Scripture that the gift of languages was the miraculous ability to be able to speak in a language of man that was not known to the one receiving the gift, for the purpose to expand the Gospel of Jesus Christ very quickly in the early days of Christianity within a region of the world where dozens of languages were being spoken. There is much debate within Christianity whether this gift is still being given today, but Scripturally there is no evidence that the language being spoken is anything other than a known language of man given for the purpose of preaching the Gospel. If you encounter anything other than this today, it is not the gift of speaking in languages which we read about in the Bible. In not one place in Scripture do we find an angelic language being spoken, unintelligible gibberish that no one can understand. Nor do we read that all Christians must have this gift, that this gift can be taught, or that if you don't speak in these tongues you cannot have eternal life. These are traditions of man and should be treated as such.

Every Place the Greek Word “Glossa” Appears in Both Old and New Testament:

Old Testament:	Psalm 45:1	Proverbs 17:4
Genesis 10:5	Psalm 50:19	Proverbs 17:20
Genesis 10:20	Psalm 51:14	Proverbs 18:21
Genesis 10:31	Psalm 52:2	Proverbs 21:6
Genesis 11:7	Psalm 52:4	Proverbs 21:23
Exodus 11:7	Psalm 55:9	Proverbs 24:22
Joshua 7:21	Psalm 57:4	Proverbs 25:15
Joshua 10:21	Psalm 64:3	Proverbs 25:23
Judges 7:5	Psalm 64:8	Proverbs 26:28
Judges 7:6	Psalm 66:17	Proverbs 27:20
2 nd Samuel 23:2	Psalm 68:23	Proverbs 31:25
Job 5:21	Psalm 71:24	Songs of Solomon 4:11
Job 6:30	Psalm 73:9	Isaiah 3:8
Job 20:12	Psalm 48:36	Isaiah 19:18
Job 20:16	Psalm 81:5	Isaiah 28:11
Job 29:10	Psalm 109:2	Isaiah 29:24
Job 33:2	Psalm 119:172	Isaiah 32:4
Psalm 5:9	Psalm 120:3	Isaiah 35:6
Psalm 10:7	Psalm 126:2	Isaiah 41:17
Psalm 12:3	Psalm 137:6	Isaiah 45:23
Psalm 12:4	Psalm 139:4	Isaiah 50:4
Psalm 14:3	Psalm 140:3	Isaiah 57:4
Psalm 15:3	Proverbs 3:16	Isaiah 59:3
Psalm 16:9	Proverbs 6:17	Isaiah 66:18
Psalm 22:15	Proverbs 6:24	Jeremiah 5:15
Psalm 31:20	Proverbs 10:20	Jeremiah 9:3
Psalm 34:13	Proverbs 10:31	Jeremiah 9:5
Psalm 35:28	Proverbs 12:18	Jeremiah 9:8
Psalm 37:30	Proverbs 12:19	Jeremiah 18:18
Psalm 39:1	Proverbs 15:2	Jeremiah 23:31
Psalm 39:3	Proverbs 15:4	Lamentations 4:4

Ezekiel 3:6	1 st Cor. 13:8
Ezekiel 3:26	1 st Cor. 14:2
Ezekiel 36:3	1 st Cor. 14:4
Daniel 1:4	1 st Cor. 14:5
Daniel 3:4	1 st Cor. 14:6
Daniel 3:7	1 st Cor. 14:9
Daniel 3:29	1 st Cor. 14:13
Daniel 4:1	1 st Cor. 14:14
Daniel 5:19	1 st Cor. 14:18
Daniel 6:25	1 st Cor. 14:19
Daniel 7:14	1 st Cor. 14:22
Hosea 7:16	1 st Cor. 14:23
Micah 6:12	1 st Cor. 14:26
Zephaniah 3:13	1 st Cor. 14:27
Zechariah 8:23	1 st Cor. 14:39
Zechariah 14:12	Phil. 2:11
	James 1:26
New Testament:	James 3:5
Mark 7:33	James 3:6
Mark 7:35	James 3:8
Mark 16:17	1 st Peter 3:10
Luke 1:64	1 st John 3:18
Luke 16:24	Rev. 5:9
Acts 2:3	Rev. 7:9
Acts 2:4	Rev. 10:11
Acts 2:26	Rev. 11:9
Acts 10:46	Rev. 13:7
Acts 19:6	Rev. 14:6
Romans 3:13	Rev. 16:10
Romans 14:11	Rev. 17:15
1 st Cor. 12:10	
1 st Cor. 12:28	
1 st Cor. 12:30	
1 st Cor. 13:1	

About The Author:



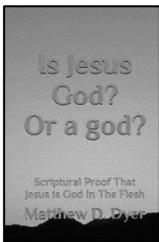
Matthew Dyer is a Pastor, head of Christian America Ministries, and host of a weekly shortwave radio show and online podcast. Dyer is a student of both the Bible and history. He and his wife, Cassie, are the parents of four children

Other books written by Matthew Dyer:



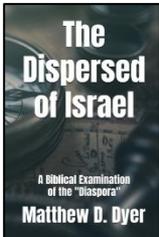
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