

I. Tongues Overview

A. Outpouring of the Spirit - The gift of tongues manifested initially during the outpouring of the Spirit that Joel prophesied would happen in the last days. This event has much greater significance than most people realize, especially when it comes to understanding why the gift of tongues is given so that the Jewish sojourners gathered in Jerusalem heard the wonders of God in their native languages.

1. Tower of Babel - To see the full significance of this event and why God chose to mark it with the gift of tongues, we must look back at the event of scattering the nations by confusing their speech in judgment of the tower they built after the flood. This event is known in scholarship as the “disinheritation of the nations”. The following passage “describes how Yahweh’s dispersal of the nations at Babel resulted in His disinheriting those nations as his people.”

“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He divided mankind, He fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. But the Lord’s portion is His people, Jacob His allotted heritage.” Deut. 32:8-9

- a. Israel - After God disinherited the nations, he then chose one nation, “Israel,” to be the nation through which he would bring about His promise to restore all that was lost at the fall. From this nation would come a righteous and just King. He would rule the earth and through Him, God would judge sin and death, save humanity, and restore to her His intended existence forever.
2. Prophetic Fulfillment - One of the primary promises of the mission of this prophesied King is the reversal of the disinheritation of the nations. Through His righteous and just work, He would welcome the nations back and restore their inheritance to them. (Ps. 72)

*“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD’s house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And **all nations** shall flow to it. (Is. 2:2)”*

***“Even them** I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and **their sacrifices will be accepted** on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for **all nations**.” (Is. 56:7)”*

- B. The Fulfillment - Jesus tells his disciples in Acts. 1:4-8 that He was soon going to send the promise of the Holy Spirit upon them. The giving or filling of the Holy Spirit to His people was a Messianic promise of the New Covenant through which the Kingdom would expand and impact the world. He then tells them that they are to be the witnesses of His kingdom in Jerusalem, all of Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
 - 1. The very same nations who were disinherited at the tower of Babel are now represented in Acts 2, and they are filled with the Spirit. The sign God chose to give, confirming the time of redemption and restoration that was beginning, was to empower prophetic praise in their national language through His Spirit.
 - 2. The subsequent times in the book of Acts that we see the gift of tongues as the immediate manifestation or proof of individuals coming into the Kingdom are in Judea, Samaria, and the capital city of the ends of the known world at that time, Ephesus. The statement is clear that God was and is, in fact, reinheriting the nations and bringing them into His Kingdom, just as He said He would. (Acts 10:46; 19:6)

II. Distinct Manifestations

- A. Now that we have a better understanding of the “why” of the gift of tongues, let's look at its three distinct uses (*varieties of tongues*) and how each use brings strength and maturity to the body. Paul devoted a major portion of his letter to the church of Corinth, helping them understand spiritual gifts. Around 30% of the text is aimed at helping us understand the purpose and manifestations of the gift of tongues. (1 Cor. 12-14; 1 Cor. 12:27-30, 13:1, 14:1-40)
 - 1. Personal Edification - Paul introduces the gift of tongues as a gift that builds up or edifies our spirit because we are praying to God through a language other than our own. He informs us that when we speak in tongues, we are praying blessings, giving thanks, offering encouragement and truths that edify our spirit. He then boldly says that he does this sort of personal prayer more than any other person in Corinth. (1 Cor. 14:1-19)

2. A Sign and Wonder to Unbelievers - Another use of the gift of tongues is as a sign and wonder in evangelism. This is exactly what we see in Acts 2. The Spirit gave individuals supernatural ability to speak a known language of another nation so that those from that nation could understand clearly what was being said. In that specific case, fourteen different languages were being spoken through the gift of tongues. This use of the gift of tongues is meant to break pride and humble men before God so that they would yield themselves to receiving truth. (1 Cor. 14:20-25)
3. Encouraging or Building Up the Body - Lastly, Paul addresses how the gift of tongues can build up the body in a corporate gathering of believers. In this instance, someone offers a public prophetic encouragement in another language through the gift of tongues. This prophetic encouragement, however, is not understood because it's in another language, and so there needs to be an interpretation or no one is encouraged by it. If there is no interpretation, it is not sinful or wrong; it's simply unfruitful. (1 Cor. 14:26-40)

B. Maturing in the Gift of Tongues - Throughout his practical teaching on the whys and hows of the gift of tongues, Paul gives a few principles and encouragements to help us grow in our maturity and love when we are walking in the gift of tongues.

1. Humility - The gift of tongues produces or mandates humility, and in this way, it is superior to praying or prophesying in our own language. The gift of tongues demands courage and vast humility to be willing to look and act so foolish before our community or strangers. All the gifts of the Spirit mandate a degree of courage and humility, but I believe tongues is chief among them all in producing these two things.
2. Consideration of Others - The nature of the gift of tongues mandates us to consider others and prompts us to choose meekness. This is especially true in a setting where we all speak the same language. I believe that the charismatic church has a long way to go in this regard.