The Cessation of Tongues

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In this chapter we intend to show that the Bible teaches that tongue-speaking ceased when prophecy ceased. The discussion on tongues-speaking is quite complex and their are a number of studies which survey the New Testament evidence in detail.[1] The present approach will focus on the two main New Testament passages, Acts 2 and I Cor. 12-14. It is our thesis that tongues-speaking was probably a declaration of the gospel (the mystery or mysteries of the Old Testament divinely revealed through the apostolate and prophets of the New Testament) in foreign languages. Peter (in Acts) and Paul (in I Cor.) both quoted Old Testament passages which together with the context of those quotes unquestionably identify tongues-speaking as a species of prophecy. We saw in the last chapter that all prophecy has ceased. Since, tongue-speaking is a kind/species of prophecy, it, too, has ceased.

I. THE PENTECOST ACCOUNT

The most important passage on tongues is in the book of Acts. Only here in the New Testament is the phenomenon explained. That explanation is not incidental but intentional. It is Peter's (the Holy Spirit's) answer to the perplexity of those who observed and heard the phenomenon. Our discussion will treat the evidence that tongues was foreign languages, the evidence that tongues was prophecy, and finally, a few observations on the phenomenon as represented in the rest of Acts.

A. TONGUES AS FOREIGN LANGUAGES

We believe that there is rather strong evidence in Acts 2 that the tongues-speaking reported there was preaching the mystery of the gospel in foreign languages. The evidence for this is the phrases "other tongues," "give utterance," "hear . . . in our own language," and an examination of the accusation that the Christians were drunk. These will be discussed in the order that they occur in the text because the force of the latter phrases depends on the force of the former.

1. "Other Tongues"[2]

Luke reports in Acts 2:4 that they began to speak with "other tongues." A study of "tongues" in the Scripture produces this phrase only once in the Old Testament (and the New Testament), viz., Isa. 28:11.[3] Since this passage is quoted by Paul in I Cor. 14:2 1 as the Old Testament promise of what was happening in Corinth, it is most crucial to our study. Needless to say, the occurence of this phrase in Acts 2:4 and I Cor. 14:21 binds the two passages together.

What does "another tongue" mean in Isa. 28:11?

Nay, but by men of strange lips and another tongue will I speak to this people.

E.J. Young says it means a "foreign language."[4] A survey of every occurence of "tongue" in the Old Testament reveals that the word means: *1* the instrument (i.e., organ of the body) whether of man (Lam. 4:4) or beast (Ps. 140:3(4); *2* a shape similar to a tongue (Josh. 7:21); *3* the tongue considered as an organ of speech (Ex. 4:10); and 4) a known human language.[5] It is only this last use that fits Isa. 28:11 since the adjective "another" can hardly be meaningful if God means another kind of instrument or another kind of speech-making

instrument shaped like a tongue. The Babylonian invaders were, after all, human beings. Hence, God means that He will speak to His people in a foreign language.

There are many occurences of this use of "tongue" in the Old Testament.[6] For example, "tongue(s)" clearly means language(s) in Ezk. 3:5, "For you are not sent to a people of a strange speech and of a hard tongue," Zech. 8:23, "all the tongues of the nations," and Isa. 66:18, "I will gather all nations and tongues."

Especially relevant to Isa. 28:11 are Deut. 28:49 and Jer. 5:15. These three passages are closely tied together. In Deut. 28:49 Moses sets forth the promise of divine judgment on rebellious Israel.

> Jehovah will bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth. . . a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand.

Jeremiah pointedly recalls this promise prophesying its immanent fulfillment.

> Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, says Jehovah, it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, whose tongue thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say (5:15).

Isaiah's prophecy is a pronouncement of divine judgment, too (e.g., cf., 28:15, 17, l8).[7] He, too, recalls the ancient prophecy, but he gives it a new twist (to be studied under I Cor. 12:14).

There is still other evidence that "another tongue" means "in a foreign language." First, the phrase parallel to "another tongue" is "strange lips." The Hebrew word *la^{c}ag* (i.e., "strange") signifies to mock, to make fun of, to have in derision. It is

frequently synonymous to words signifying laughing (e.g., Job 22:19, Ps. 2:4, Jer. 20:7), or despising (e.g., II Kgs. 19:21, Isa. 37:22, Prov. 30:17, Ps. 22:7 (8)), or belittling with words (e.g., Ps. 44:13(14), 79:4). When describing the activity of enemies *la^{c}ag* connotes their use of abusive language by which they mock their foe. So God describes Israel's mocking Sennacherib wagging her head in scorn (II Kgs. 19:21). Sanballet angrily mocks the Jews before his army (Neh. 4:1; 3:33) saying,

> What are these feeble Jews doing? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, seeing they are burned? (Neh. 4:2)

David (also, the Messiah) says his enemies "mock him to scorn, they shoot with the lip, they shake the head, *saying* . . . (Ps. 22:7 (8)). Verses 6 (7) and 8 (9) make it clear that our root connotes abusive, mocking speech or speaking. During the exile Israel's enemies make fun of her (Ps. 79:4). Perhaps the most important use of *la^{c}ag* in helping us to understand Isa. 28:11 is Isa. 33:19.

> Thou shalt not see the fierce people, a people of deep speech that thou canst not comprehend, of a strange (*la^{c}ag*) tongue that thou canst not understand.

This passage shows that "deep speech" is parallel (equal) to "strange tongue." Immediately, one recognizes here a similarity to Ezk. 3:5, 6. This latter passage ties our terms to a known but foreign language. Also, "fierce people" connects our passage to Deut. 28:49 (except here in Isa. the promise is the opposite of that in Deut.). The most important observation here, however, is that in this passage where *la^{c}ag* clearly refers to a foreign language (n.b., *la^{c}ag* should be rendered "mocking" instead of

"strange") *la^{c}ag* is directly tied to "tongue." In Isa. 28:11 *la^{c}ag* modifies "lips" in the first half of the parallel.

The second proof that *Ia^{c}ag* means mocking speech rather than "stammering" or "stuttering" is Isa. 32:4.

> And the heart of the rash shall understand knowledge and the tongue of stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.

The Hebrew word translated "stammerers" is *^{c}illag* This word has the same radicals as *l^{c}g* (i.e., *^{c}lg)* but they occur in a different order. This *^{c}lg* is a *hapax legomenon* (it occurs only here in the Old Testament). There are no variant readings to it either. This shows that Isaiah knew and used a word which clearly means "to not speak plainly," to "stammer or stutter." In view of the abundant evidence that *l^{c}g* means mocking speech and the use of *^{c}lg* in Isa. 32:4, we must conclude that Isaiah intentionally chose *l^{c}g* in 28:11 to connote a foreign language and not mere babbling.

That *la^{c}ag* means a foreign language is also shown by verses 10 and 13. There the message God delivers to His people is characterized as the simple sounds produced by young children. One should not go too far and conclude that this refers to children just learning to speak and represents the first nonsense sounds they produce. This is not possible because the sounds are too complex for infants (i.e., *stadi, ^{c}ayin* and *resh* are all sounds which require considerable muscle control). Hence, this image may be of children of sufficient age to start formal schooling. Perhaps there is also an allusion to the way children were taught cuneiform by repeatedly writing out the syllables. Whether or not this is the case the Hebrew meaning of the syllables must

be granted insofar as they serve a meaningful function in the context.[8] The mocking by Israel consisted of deriding God's word characterizing it as boring and meaningless repetition (10). But God will declare the simple truths of His word to them in a language they do not understand "that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken" (13, cf., Isa. 6:9ff).

Therefore, "other tongues" (Acts 2:4) means "other languages". This is true because *1* "other tongues" recalls the "another tongue" of Isa. 28:11, *2* because "tongue" in the Old Testament when used in reference to one's enemies means "language," *3* because Deut. 28:49, Jer. 5:15, etc., trace a divine promise of judgment at the hands of an enemy speaking a foreign language, 4 the parallel to "another tongue" is "mocking lips," *5* that Isaiah knew a word for stammering/stuttering (viz., *^{c}lg)* which although quite close in spelling to *$l^{c}g$* he clearly distinguished from *$l^{c}g$* in meaning and use, and *6* the actual product of "mocking lips and another tongue" is a meaningful message like that which children may learn in grammar school.

Finally, the Isa. 28:11 usage is meaningful for Acts 2:4 not only because of the similarity between the actual words, but because the "tongues" of both passages is (as we shall see below) prophecy and because Isa. 28:11 describes the climactic manner in which the gospel shall be preached in initiating the messianic age.

2. "Give Utterance

The second indication that "tongues" in Acts was foreign languages is the phrase "give utterance,"

> . . . and they began to speak with other tongues, as the

> Spirit gave them utterance. (2:4)

The "Spirit" here is the "Holy Spirit" mentioned earlier in the verse. The Greek words rendered "give utterance" consist of a finite verb plus an infinitive (*apophtheggesthai*). It is this infinitive which interests us. This verb clearly signifies a prophetic utterance especially connoting an excited outpouring of truth. It occurs six times in the Septuagint.[9] In I Chron. 25:1 it is used of the singing and composing of those who performed the songs of/in the Temple. The Hebrew behind the Greek is the word "prophesy" (see above). In Ps. 59:7 (8) the Greek word connotes the effusive Outpouring of blasphemy from the sharp-tongued unbeliever (the Hebrew word connotes a "gushing, outpouring" (of words). In Ezk. 13:9, 19; Mic. 5:12, Zech. 10:2 the Greek word represents the lying prophesying of false prophets. The noun derived from this verb (*apophthegma*) occurs only twice in the Septuagint (and not at all in the New Testament) and in both instances it represents understandable speech. In Deut. 32:2 it is parallel to *rhema* (spoken words) and represents the Hebrew word for doctrine. In Ezk. 13:19 it represents the lies spoken by the false prophets.

Even more convincing, however, is the use of this word in the New Testament. It is used only by Luke in Acts. The first occurrence (after 2:4) is in 2:14.

> But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spoke forth unto them saying, "Ye men of Judea. . . ."

There can be no question that the consistent meaning of the word in the Septuagint recurs here in Acts 2:14. It clearly means to "speak forth" prophetically. Especially, note the emphasis on the apostolate as the collective authority behind the message about to be declared. Furthermore, the uttering of

2:4 must be the same as the uttering of 2:14 since the former is effected by the same Spirit. The difference is that in 2:4 this uttering is also pointedly described as "other tongues." The second occurrence of our verb is in Acts 26:25.

> But Paul saith, I am not mad, most excellent Festus; but speak forth words of truth and soberness.

This serves to greatly reinforce our argument since "to speak forth" here is associated with "being mad." "Being mad" was the accusation hurled against the Old Testament prophets, too (cf., II Kgs. 9:11). It characterizes both the demeanor and message of the prophet as does *apophtheggesthai.*

Therefore, because "speaking in other tongues" is described as the product of the Spirit's causing them "to utter effusively and prophetically" and because "to utter effusively and prophetically" clearly means to speak (or, claim to speak) the divine word, "tongues" represents such speaking. In every use of the word other than Acts 2:4 the Bible (Septuagint or New Testament) applies this word to speaking in a known language. Since this is a rather rare word its use in Acts 2:4 is quite significant and intentional, i.e., it means to speak in a known human language.

3. "Hear. . . in own languages."

The immediately preceding evidence must be taken in conjunction with "every man heard them speaking in his own language." The verb *apophtheggesthai* limits the message to the prophetic declaration of the gospel in a known language. As Luke continues to unravel the account the reader is not at all surprised then when he reports that the hearers heard the gospel in their own languages (2:6, 8, 11). Some readers may mistakenly interpret this as a miracle of hearing as well as a miracle of speaking. This cannot be both because "other

tongues" means "other languages" and because *apophtheggesthai* describes the energy of the delivery, the quality of the message (that it is prophetic) and the nature of the reception (that it is understandable to the hearer). Therefore, one cannot separate the speaking and the hearing. They heard what was spoken because it was spoken in their language. In this regard especially note Acts 2:14 where Peter expressly addresses the Judeans in the Hebrew language (cf., 10, 11). That is, *apophtheggesthai* leads us to conclude that this tongues-speaking was a miracle of speaking only. In Peter's case it was a miracle of delivery, that is, prophecy.

This phrase "hear. . . in own languages," furthermore, gives additional proof that tongues was "foreign languages" because it is used synonymously with "speaking in our tongues." Hence, "language" and "tongue" mean the same thing. What was heard then was "speaking-in-(foreign)-tongues/languages."

4. "They are filled with new wine."

This accusation "they were filled with new wine" lends support to our thesis that the disciples were speaking in foreign languages. First, recall the accusation against Jesus, that He was a "winebibber" (Matt. 11:19). This is the Old Testament description of false prophets. There are many examples of this, but especially note its use in Isa. 28. There the Lord condemns the leaders of Israel because they have lost all sense and have turned from Him. They are "drunkards," "overcome with wine" (1). They will be judged by the coming conquerors (2).

> Even these reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. (7)

Therefore, in Acts this is not an accusation that they are

speaking in gibberish. Indeed, their language was clearly understood (2:6, 8, 11). The charge is leveled against their judgment, against the validity of the message they were proclaiming.

Therefore, we conclude that the tongues-speaking in Acts 2 was known languages. In summary, our evidence is that “other tongues” means “other languages,” that “give utterance” means “to cause to utter effusively and prophetically so that the hearer may clearly understand,” that “hear. . . in our languages” is to be taken to mean that they heard them “speaking-in-their own languages,” and that “they were filled with new wine” is an accusation against their judgment and message, an accusation that could be made only if they were understood and not because of supposed babbling in gibberish.

B. TONGUES AS PROPHECY.

This section is even more important to our main thesis than is the section immediately preceding. Whether or not “tongues” was foreign languages, if it was prophecy, then it has ceased. One should refer to the discussion “give utterance” and “they were filled with new wine” for the first indications that tongues is prophecy. In addition we want to consider here the nature and significance of that prophecy.

1. The Nature of that Prophecy.

That tongues is prophecy is clearly stated in Acts 2:16ff. In explaining what was happening Peter quotes Joel 2:28ff. The promise recorded there was now being fulfilled. God had promised to “pour forth of His Holy Spirit” (17) and Luke tells us that He did it and “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” That promise was that the recipients of the Holy Spirit “prophesy,” and Luke records that Peter says this tongue-speaking “is that which had been spoken through Joel.”

Therefore, “tongues” is a species/kind of prophesying. It is the pronouncing of the gospel (in foreign languages).

This “prophecy” partakes of the essential nature of Old Testament prophecy, i.e., it is a divine disclosing of verbal revelation. In addition to the evidence cited in the previous chapter, this conclusion is established by the phrases “see visions” and “dream dreams.”[10]

In the Old Testament these phrases had the special connotation of receiving divine verbal revelation apart from the written word. In Num. 12:6 Moses was told that God would, henceforth, speak to prophets in a way less immediate than the “face to face” relationship He sustained to Moses (cf., I Sam. 9:9). The claim for a divine message was “I have had a dream” (Deut. 13:1). The prophetic writings use these phrases with the same connotation. False prophets claim divine authority for their messages by saying they have had dreams and visions (e.g., Jer. 14:14, 23:16). The true prophetic message is called a “dream” or “vision” (e.g., Obad. 1, Isa. 1:1 — the heading of the entire book). During the exile all leadership fails and it is said that there is no vision from the Lord (e.g., Isa. 29:9-12, Lam. 2:9). Dreams and visions are also the means by which God delivers His message (Dan. 2:1, 19, 1:17, 7:1). The emphasis is on the content — viz., a divine message. Peter’s quotation of Joel 2:28 extends and applies that promise to all the believers (the 120) who were then preaching in foreign languages. They were all recipients of divine revelation.

2. The Significance of that Prophecy.

The Joel quotation tells us, furthermore, that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a climactic event gauged to mark the judgment of Israel and the restoration of the true people of God. Some students of Acts 2:17-20 would say that 19-20 are not intended to apply to the Pentecost event. This can hardly be

true since Peter pointedly and under divine inspiration says it does (16). Therefore, those strange words must have meaning for the tongues-speaking event. They do. They tell us that this was a climactic event.

To better understand 19-20 it is profitable to study the relevant phrases in the Old Testament." Such a study will show that these are recurring images in the Old Testament.[11] First, they are used as a sign of judgment of God's enemies. Perhaps they emphasize the omnipotence of God in executing judgment or perhaps they figure God's conquest of the so-called gods of the heathen. In any case they are not to be taken as literal. When God judges Babylon,

> the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in its going forth and the moon shall not cause its light to shine (Isa. 13: 10).

When Egypt is judged by God, says Ezekiel, all the hosts of heaven will be darkened (32:7, 8). Joel prefigures the Babylonian conquest of Israel in similar terms (Joel 2:10). These phrases also figure divine blessing upon His people either because He is judging their enemies (e.g., Joel 3:15, 16) or because the redeemer has come and there is no need for these heavenly lights (Isa. 60:19).

Therefore, the darkening, etc., of the heavenly lights is a sign both of judgment on God's enemies and of His redemptive blessing. Both of these connotations come together in Joel 2:31. That this is a climactic phenomenon is evident, furthermore, from the phrase "the great and terrible day of Jehovah."

C. TONGUES IN ACTS

The discussion of tongues in Acts 2 establishes the nature and

significance of the phenomenon throughout Acts. In Acts 10:47 Cornelius' household evidenced the tongues phenomenon and Peter said they had "received the Holy Spirit *just as we*." The receiving of the Holy Spirit was the same, and so was the reception of tongues that publicly attested that reception. When Peter reports this incident to the church at Jerusalem he says:

> As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he did upon us as at the beginning (11:15).

There can be no question that this is the same phenomenon that occurred on Pentecost.[12] In Acts 19:6 the new believers in Ephesus were baptized, and had apostolic (Paul's) hands laid on them. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them. The effect of the Holy Spirit's coming was that they spoke in tongues and prophesied. The parallel between this and Acts 2 is not as clear as is the case in Acts 10-11, but it is clear enough to leave no doubt. Tongues again is directly related to the coming of the Holy Spirit upon believers. In Acts 10:44 the Holy Spirit came/fell on all who heard. It appears that there is a direct relationship here between regeneration and the coming of the Holy Spirit producing tongues-speaking. However, this is not a necessary connection because in Acts 2 many believed and were added to the church but did not speak in tongues (2:41-42). Especially, noteworthy, is Paul's discussion of Holy Spirit baptism in Rom. 6:1-11 and Col. 2:11ff. In neither case does the discussion connect Holy Spirit baptism with tongues-speaking. Tongues-speaking is not, therefore, the normal/ordinary evidence of regeneration. The truly regenerate has the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but tongues-speaking (even in the New Testament era) is not a necessary experience. Furthermore, since in Acts 10 Christian baptism precedes the reception of the Holy Spirit and in Acts 19 it follows baptism there is no necessary connection between the symbol/sign and the reality of regeneration.

D. CONCLUSION

Our discussion of tongues in Acts supports our thesis that tongues has ceased. Acts 2 tells us that tongues was foreign languages which in the Old Testament were prophesied as a sign of God's judgment on the ungodly and of His deliverance of the elect. Also, it is clearly a species of prophecy. Finally, this same phenomenon occurs at two other places in Acts. Therefore, since the phenomenon in Acts is prophecy and since prophecy has ceased, so has that phenomenon.

II. THE CORINTHIAN ACCOUNT

We believe that Paul's discussion of tongues in Corinth shows that this was the same phenomenon as that which is seen in Acts. There is a strong *prima facia* case for this identity since the vocabulary is the same. Those who wish to distinguish the two phenomena have to establish quite a convincing case for their position. In addition to the *prima facia* argument there is much evidence that the two phenomena are the same. In I Cor. 14:21 Paul uses Isa. 28:11 to explain what tongues-speaking is. He uses the context of that verse in Isa. to explain the significance of tongues. The identification of tongues finds additional support in I Cor. 14:1-19. Verses 26-33 gives further evidence as to the significance of tongues. We will also consider Paul's mention of tongues in I Cor. 13.

A. THE IDENTITY OF TONGUES

Paul gives sufficient evidence in I Cor. 14 to conclude that the Corinthian phenomenon was foreign languages. This evidence consists of Paul's quotation of Isa. 28:11 and various hints in 1-19.

1. Paul's Use of Isaiah 28:11

The use of Isa. 28:11 in I Cor. 14:21 is clearly intended to

identify the Corinthian experience with what was promised in Isa. 28. Earlier in this chapter[13] we saw that Isaiah spoke of foreign languages when he spoke of “mocking lips and another tongue.” Little more needs to be said, yet there is much more that can be said.

First, I Cor. 14:20ff parallels the argument of Isa. 28:9f. In 28:9 we read,

> Whom will he teach knowledge and whom will he make to understand the message? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?

Israel mocked God by rudely parroting His law in childlike speech. When Paul warns the Corinthians not to be babes he draws their attention to the fate of Israel. Could there be a veiled warning to the childish Corinthians if they persisted in exalting the tongues phenomenon above the clear word of prophecy?[14]

Secondly, in 28:11-14 Isaiah describes the significance of tongues/foreign-languages as a judgmental instrument. This instrument would serve prophetically, however, insofar as it would reiterate the message of the Old Testament gospel (12) in terms of its fulfillment in the Messiah (16). The effect of this would be judgmental and destructive (13) or (if believed) redemptive (16). This is precisely the effect of tongues in I Cor., as we shall see below in greater detail.

2. Hints in 1-19

There are further hints in 1-19 that tongues was foreign languages. Perhaps the most convincing (to this writer) appears in verses 10-11.

> There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and no kind is without signification. If then I

> know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me.

In other words, every human dialect has some relationship between sound and sense. This is true with every natural foreign language. But if one does not understand that language it becomes to him meaningless speech. The same is true in the case of musical instruments (8). If there is no distinction in the tune the intention of the player will be unknown. Uninterpreted tongues are like instruments which play in uncertain tunes, i.e., meaningless to the hearer. They are like barbarian languages. Indeed, the tongue-speaker is a barbarian to the one who hears and does not understand.

It seems to this writer that Paul is identifying tongues-speaking and barbarian languages. Tongues-speaking is a "voice in the world."[15] It has some "signification," i.e., it can be interpreted (13). It does bear a specific message (2, 15ff). The point of misunderstanding is not the difference between singing and speaking (15), but between singing whose meaning is understood and singing whose meaning is not understood. Tongues, therefore, is the speaking of specific messages (which can be agreed with if understood, 16) in a barbarian/foreign language. This argument against the background of verses 20f gives further support to the thesis that "tongues" was foreign languages.

Therefore, because Paul describes tongues as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy that the gospel would be preached in foreign languages, and because tongues is functionally equal to barbarian languages, tongues is foreign languages.

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TONGUES

The most important part of our argument, however, is that

tongues is a species of prophecy and, therefore, ceased when prophecy ceased. This is supported in I Cor. 12-14 by its various functions, viz., as convenantal fulfillment, as convenantal sign, as prophecy, as ecstasy, and as transitional.

1. Covenantal Fulfillment

We have already seen that "tongues" functions as covenantal fulfillment by discussing Acts 2,[16] but it is noteworthy that this same theme emerges in I Cor. 14. This is the theme that goes back through Isa. 28:11, Jer. 5:15 and Deut. 28:49. The force of this theme was shifted in Isa. 28 when the prophet pointedly linked it to the messianic age by mentioning the cornerstone (16). This message, Isaiah predicts, will cause Israel to "go and stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive" (13). Again, recall Isa. 6:9-13 where the prophet's preaching was to bear similar fruit. In Isa. 28, however, it is the cornerstone that is the offense.

> Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of sure foundation: he that believeth in it shall not be disturbed.

This verse is frequently alluded to in the New Testament. In addition to Paul's use in Eph. 2:20 and I Cor. 3:11 which we have already discussed, there is Rom. 9:31-33 where Paul uses this verse to explain Israel's stumbling. Here Paul identifies this precious cornerstone as Christ and links it with Isaiah's stone of stumbling (Isa. 8:14). Peter quotes Isa. 28:16 as an Old Testament prophecy of Jesus (I Peter 2:6) whom he calls elect and precious (2:4). He also unites Isa. 8:14 and Ps. 118:22.

> The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner (Ps. 118:22).

A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (Isa. 8:14). These,

too, he clearly applies to Christ in I Pet. 2:4, 9. Thus an Old Testament theme is set before us; a theme which appears again in Acts 4:11. Here Ps. 118:22 is cited by Peter who applies it to Jesus the only source of salvation. Jesus Himself used Ps. 118:22 as reported in the Gospels (Matt. 2:12-26, Mk. 12:10-11, Lk. 20:17-18). He cites this Old Testament prophecy of judgment to support His teaching that the kingdom would be taken from Israel. Thus, there is clearly messianic and climactic overtones to this Isa. 28:16 passage.[17]

This "stone" theme as a figure of the termination of God's peculiar relationship to Israel "enforces the significance of Paul's citation of the curses of the covenant as they relate to the phenomenon of tongues."[18] Tongues then is a sign of the realization (fulfillment) of the redemptive curse. They are bound to the "stone" theme, and as such are historically and temporally tied to Christ the foundation. When the "stone," the foundation, had been laid (Eph. 2:20) "tongues" ceased (i.e., the Corinthian phenomenon).

2. Covenantal Sign

How does tongues serve as a covenantal sign? The sign-function marks both the curse and blessing of God. At Pentecost tongues signified the removal of the kingdom from Israel. Christ had promised this (Matt. 21:42-44); now it was occurring. As we saw above the reference to the darkening of the heavenly bodies emphasizes this very point. One can hardly ignore the obvious parallel to this in Isa. 28 and Paul's citation of it in I Cor. 14. Tongues also signified God's gracious redemption of His people. This is evidenced at Pentecost by the same figure of the darkening of the heavenly bodies and accomplished by the salvation of the 3000 (Acts 2:41). This is obviously paralleled in the tongues phenomenon in I Cor. by the fact that even uninterpreted tongues is speaking "mysteries" (i.e., the gospel of Christ, as we shall see below) albeit "in the

spirit."

Let us first address Paul's indication that tongues is a sign of covenantal judgment. In I Cor. 14:22 he specifically describes tongues as a "sign, not to them that believe, but to the unbelieving." We should especially note how Paul connects his quotation of Isa. 28:11 and his explanation. He connects them with "wherefore." By this he indicates that there is an immediate and direct relationship between the two. This not only supports some of our previous argumentation but it draws our attention pointedly to his explanation. "Tongues" is a sign to unbelievers:

> Because of their particular role as sealing God's judgment on unbelieving Israel, tongues communicate a special message to current unbelievers. . . . They testify to God's fidelity to the word of his covenantal curses.[19]

It is most striking, then, that Paul recommends that prophecy be used in public worship instead of tongues. This is not clearly stated but it is clearly implied. In I Cor. 14:1-19 Paul argues that uninterpreted tongues is inferior to interpreted tongues and/or prophecy. It is upon this background that he states that tongues is not preferred in public worship when unbelievers are present.

> If therefore the whole church be assembled together and all speak with tongues, and there come in men unlearned or unbelieving, will they not say ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one unbelieving or unlearned, he is reproved by all, he is judged by all. . . . (23, 24)

Thus he recommends that "prophesying" is preferable in public worship. Even if tongues are to be allowed, it is only on the

condition that they be interpreted (28) so that they function in the same way as does prophecy, viz., to edify the hearers (5). This seeming paradox (that tongues the sign for unbelievers is to be avoided when unbelievers are present) can be explained only if tongues is a sign of judgment against unbelievers. Since the usual function of worship was not judgmental but redemptive only the instruments which serve that purpose (viz., interpreted tongues (27), prophecy (29), and order (32, 33)) are to be exercised. Tongues, therefore, is a sign of God's covenantal judgment on unbelievers whether Jewish or Gentile.[20]

Secondly, tongues is a sign of the breaking-in of the covenantal blessing. It marks the beginning of the messianic age as does prophecy (see above). We will examine this in more detail when we discuss the prophetic function of tongues. Therefore, tongues was a covenantal sign to unbelievers that God had consummated his redemptive plan in judgment and blessing.

3. Prophetic Function

Tongues whether interpreted or uninterpreted served a prophetic function, viz., it was a means whereby God divinely disclosed verbal revelation. It is very important to grasp this function for it, above all, shows that tongues has ceased.

a. Uninterpreted Tongues

Our argument here is that uninterpreted tongues fulfilled the general purpose of tongues. That general purpose is declared in Isa. 28 as the declaration of the fulfillment of redemption in Christ, and the opening up of the kingdom to all men. These themes are the content of the "mystery" revealed to the New Testament apostles and prophets, and that mystery (conceived as multiple truths in I Cor.) is what is spoken when one speaks in tongues.

First, Isaiah prophesies that the gospel will be declared through the use of tongues. The problem Isaiah addresses is the apostasy of the religious leaders of Israel (7). Both priest (Lev. 10:11, cf., Mic. 3:11, Mal. 2:7, II Chron. 17:9) and prophets (see above, chapter II) were instruments by which God instructed His people. However, instead of being faithful to their task (9), they openly ridiculed the divine message (10). This was not merely an apostasy of the leaders, but it was an apostasy of the nation, hence, God enunciates the ancient promise of judgment at the hand of foreign invaders (11). However, unlike Jeremiah (5:15) who sees these invaders merely as instruments of judgment, Isaiah surprisingly announces that they will also be instruments by which redemption is proclaimed. The Gentiles will declare divine truth in their own language. They will repeat the ancient message of redemption in simple terms (12-13): "This is the rest, give ye rest to the weary, and this is the refreshing (12)." This was the message Israel had rejected, "yet ye would not hear."[21] That ancient message focused on the temporary place(s) of rest where God camped in the midst of His people (Num. 10:33), the more permanent place where God settled in the midst of the promised land (Deut. 12:8, I Kgs. 8:56, Ps. 132:14) and the eternal soteriological resting place,[22] heaven (Ps. 95:11). This theological theme is traced in Heb. 3-4 and declared fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, the message these Gentiles are to declare is a messianic message.[23] That message will bring judgment upon unbelievers (13).

God uses yet another image to figure this messianic preaching, viz., the cornerstone (cf., above). It is a cornerstone which is divinely laid as a foundation (cf., Eph. 2:20, I Cor. 3:11). We have already seen how this theme is applied in the New Testament to Christ. This "laying of the foundation" is a message to be believed — "he that believeth shall not be

disturbed" (16).

Secondly, the New Testament explains that the fact that Jesus was this cornerstone and that in Christ the kingdom was opened up to Gentiles is the "mystery." Eph. 2:20; 3:3-11 is especially to the point.

> . . . built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone.

In addition to the obvious application of "cornerstone" to Christ let us especially note that this message was declared by the apostles and prophets (see above). Paul says that the declaration of this message was a prophetic function.

> . . . how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, I wrote before in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things; to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal

> purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. . . .

Thus, the “mystery” is “made known” by “revelation;” it is divine communication (n.b., Paul says in chapter 1 he did not become an apostle through human agency (1:1)). In former generations it was not revealed, but now it is revealed to the apostles and prophets (5). The content of that mystery is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom through their belief in Christ (6). This mystery is, indeed, the introduction of an entirely new age (9). It is God’s eternal purpose (11). It effects the end of the old dispensation. It fulfills the purpose of all redemptive history (9). Paul’s treatment in Eph. 2-3 appears to be a theological explanation in New Testament terms of Isaiah’s promise.

The other New Testament uses of this word parallel Paul’s. The origin of the Christian use of the term is the teaching of Christ. Jesus told the disciples that although He spoke to the crowds in parables,

> unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given (Matt. 13:11, cf., Mk. 4:11, Lk. 8:10).

The parables declare the truth but in hidden form (Matt. 13: 11-15). “Mysteries,” however, are the truths of the kingdom understood (16-17). The parallel between Paul’s discussion in Eph. 2-3 and Jesus’ explanation is unmistakable. In both, mystery is revealed to the apostles (and prophets). In both, mystery is the truth of the kingdom of God now revealed. In both, the prophets (and righteous men) of the Old Testament era did not receive the mystery. Besides this use by Christ and the four occurrences in Revelation, our word occurs 21 times in the New Testament and all in Paul’s writings. It most consistently denotes a divine verbal revelation. In Rom. 11:25

"mystery" is declared as "a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in." . . . In Rom. 16:25, 26 Paul wrote,

> Now to him that is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is manifested.

The same themes that Paul enunciated in Eph. 2-3 appear here. Paul's use of "mystery" in Eph. 1:9 also entails a truth made known (cf., Eph. 5:32, 6:19, Cot. 1:26, 27, 2:2, 4:3, I Tim. 3:9, 16; II Thes. 2:7). In each instance "mystery" is truth made known. The emphasis is on the fact that "mystery" has specific content. It is not to be confused with "secret" in the sense of something impenetrable. It is not something "mysterious."

The uses of the word "mystery" in I Cor. bear the same connotation. In I Cor. 2:7 "mystery" is the gospel preached by the apostles (7), and made known to them by God's Spirit (10). It is divine verbal revelation. In I Cor. 4:1 Paul asserts that he, Peter, and Apollos all declared the same message (cf., 1:12-13), the apostolic message. He begs to be so judged. They are but servants of Christ, stewards of the mysteries of God. This can mean nothing other than that they are faithful spokesmen (4:2) whose source of knowledge is not themselves but Christ, and therefore, He will be their judge (3-5). On the basis of this apostolic authority he admonishes them that they do not go beyond that which is written (4:6) and to imitate his teaching and action (14-17). In I Cor. 15:15 Paul declares that what he writes to them is a "mystery" — that is, the mystery is a truth now declared, of divine origin, and not known except through revelation. In I Cor. 13:2 Paul explains "prophecy" as knowing "all mysteries and all knowledge." This is thoroughly

consistent with his use of the term elsewhere.

The last link in our argument is that when one speaks in a tongue he speaks “mysteries.” This is Paul’s express statement in I Cor. 14:2. Remember how consistently “mystery” represents a truth divinely declared, of divine origin, and known only through revelation. This term moves exclusively in the apostolic-prophetic sphere. When associated with “tongues” it ties tongues unquestionably to prophecy. Since in the case of gibberish even the tongues-speaker does not understand the verbal context (necessarily related to New Testament tongues), and since the source of this content is God, tongues must potentially bear new verbal revelation. But this is impossible today. The canon is closed; the foundation has been laid. On the other hand, if biblical tongues-speaking were foreign languages, this in no way changes the situation, for the voice of God would be sounding today even though it would require interpretation for the message to be understood. But again it is impossible for such disclosing to be occurring today because the foundation has been laid.

b. Interpreted Tongues

Interpreted tongues fulfill the same function as does prophecy. Prophecy edifies the church (I Cor. 14:4). If tongues is interpreted the church receives edification (6). Paul writes,

> So also ye, since ye are zealous of spiritual gifts seek ye that ye may abound unto the edifying of the church. Wherefore let him who speaketh in a tongue pray that he may interpret (11, 12).

Moreover, tongues can be used in a worship service if interpreted (28). It is important to note that tongues are under the control of the speaker, and hence, those who have this gift can speak one after the other and be silent while something else

is going on (27, 28). This is true also of prophets. They cannot control the receiving of information, but they can control when they speak: “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets” (32). Both gifts (tongues, if interpreted, and prophecy) serve the same function, viz., the declaration of divine verbal revelation. In the case of prophecy this is stated expressly in I Cor. 14:30, and in the case of tongues it is stated rather clearly in verse 2. Finally, note again that in I Cor. 13:2 prophecy (as in Eph. 2-3) includes knowing (and speaking) mysteries as does tongues in I Cor. 14:2. They are both utterances “derived directly from God’s inspiration.”[24]

Therefore, tongues like prophecy was an instrument of divine revelation. The tune it played was “mysteries.” “Mysteries” whether understood or not was divine verbal revelation. The cessation of the disclosure of divine verbal revelation removed all sound from the instrument. True biblical tongues no longer sounds among Christians. It has ceased.

4. The Ecstatic Function

Paul’s treatment in I Cor. 14 shows that New Testament tongues also served a highly personal ecstatic function. The tune they played was revelational, but the playing was more than merely business. The tongues-speaker edified himself (4) but even he did not understand the meaning of the tune — his understanding was unfruitful (14). This ecstasy would accompany prayer (14), singing (15), blessing (16), and giving thanks (16, 17), but neither the instrument nor the hearer could understand what was being said unless, of course, it was interpreted. The ecstatic could speak both to himself and to God (28), but he was not to speak in public worship unless he could edify others, i.e., interpret. As wonderful as that ecstasy may have been it was a side-effect of the main function of tongues, viz., to declare mysteries. Indeed, the ecstasy itself

could not be separated from that declaration.

5. The Transitional Function

Much has been said already to substantiate that tongues, like prophecy, was revelational. But tongues served the unique role of being the sign of covenantal judgment and blessing. As Robertson says,

> Tongues serve as a sign to indicate that God's redemptive program has shifted from a Jewish-centered activity to an activity involving all the nations of the world.
>
> God's New Testament prophets suddenly burst out spontaneously in declaring the wonderful works of God in all the languages of mankind. The sign is unmistakable. The transition has occurred. God no longer speaks to a single people. He speaks in the many tongues of the many peoples of the earth. The sign of tongues is a sign of transition. A new day has dawned for the people of God.[25]

Little else needs to be added. The case has been established. Tongues was revelation and, therefore, it has ceased.

One more point might be pursued, however. In I Cor. 13:8-12 Paul writes,

> Love never faileth; but whether there be prophecies they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child. I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away

> childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

This is a clear statement that when the knowledge being given through the apostles and prophets is complete, tongues and prophecy shall cease. Tongues, prophecy, and knowledge (*gnosis*) constitute partial, incomplete stages. Some may stumble over the idea that "knowledge" represents a partial and incomplete (revelational) stage. But it is rightly remarked that Paul distinguishes between *sophia* and *gnosis* in I Cor. 12:8:

> he places *gnosis* between *apokalypsis* (revelation) and *propheteia* (prophecy) in 14:6, and beside *mysteria* (mystery) in 13:21 and thus invests the term with the significance of supernatural mystical knowledge. . . .[26]

All three terms (tongues, prophecy, knowledge) involve divine disclosure of verbal revelation and all three on that basis alone ceased when the foundation (i.e., the perfect) came (10). Verse 11 speaks of the partial as childlike (cf., 14:20) and the perfect as manly (the apostolic is "manly," too, cf., 14:20). Paul reflecting on those who are limited to these childlike things describes this limitation as seeing in a mirror darkly (12). When the perfect (the apostolic *depositum*) is come, full knowledge is present. Especially compare, II Cor. 3:16-18 where Paul once again is defending the superiority of apostolic knowledge.

> But whensoever one shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face beholding in a mirror the glory of the

> Lord are transformed into the same image from glory to glory even as from the Lord the Spirit.

And again, II Cor. 4:5-6,

> For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

To the present writer it is obvious that in II Cor. 3-4 Paul asserting his apostolic authority claims superior knowledge to Moses, and as in I Cor. 13-14 he claims superior knowledge to the prophets and tongues-speakers. Furthermore, in II Cor. he teaches that all who view matters through the apostolic teaching and who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit behold the face of Jesus Christ — face to face.

III. CONCLUSION

We conclude that tongues-speaking has ceased. In both Acts and I Cor. we saw a tongues-speaking was: *1* foreign language, *2* a fulfillment of convenantal judgment and blessing, *3* a covenantal sign, *4* that it had a prophetic function, *5* that it was transitional (climactic). Furthermore, we saw that uninterpreted tongues although ecstatic was essentially revelational. If the disclosure of divine verbal revelation has ceased there is no tongues. Tongues has ceased, therefore, for many reasons. First, the fulfillment of judgment and blessing is a once-for-all event since in Acts 2 it is tied to the figure of the signs in the heavens which specifically figure the final severance of Israel and the beginning of the opening of the kingdom to the Gentiles. In I Cor. 14 the same themes appear. There they are introduced by Paul's use of Isa. 28:11 which

verse not only limits tongues to foreign languages, but ties its appearance and function to the laying of the cornerstone, Jesus. Secondly, the covenantal sign as a sign of the fulfillment just outlined is once-for-all in that it signifies the laying of the foundation for the New Testament dispensation. That laying and, therefore, that sign are once-for-all occurrences. Thirdly, tongues whether interpreted or uninterpreted was one phenomenon. That one phenomenon was prophetic, or revelational. Since divine disclosing of verbal revelation has ceased so have the instruments to deliver that revelation. Finally, the transitional nature of tongues and their cessation at the end of the apostolic/prophetic era is pointedly stated by Paul.

Notes

1. F.D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1970). J. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Napervitte: Alec R. Allenson, 1970). A.A. Hoekema, *What About Tongue Speaking?* (*Grand* Rapids: Eerdman's, 1972). G.W. Marston, *Tongues Then and Now* (Cherry Hill: Mack, 1974). R. Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (*Nutley*, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967).
2. Mark 16:17 must be interpreted in view of (1) the fact that it is of doubtful origin, and (2) the rest of the New Testament material. Hence, "new" tongues are like "new" men (Eph. 2:15), i.e., not different in quality from "men" but a new race. Hence, tongues are still languages, but now of a different "quality," i.e., prophetic instruments in a unique sense.

3. In Isa. 28:11 the phrase is in the singular whereas in Acts 2:4 it is in the plural. Nonetheless, the similarity is undeniable, as is the place of the two passages in redemptive history, i.e., they both relate to the declaration of the gospel in the messianic age (cf., II.A. below).
4. E.J. Young, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1969), *in. loc.*
5. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1958), p. 486.
6. Gen. 10:5, 20, 31, Deut. 28:49, Neh. 13:24, Est. 1:22, 3:12, 8:9, Ps. 66:17, Isa. 3:8, 66:18, Jer. 5:15, Ezk. 3:5,6, Dan. 1:4.
7. P. Robertson, "Tongues: Sign of Covenantal Curse and Blessing," *Presbyterian Guardian,* vol. 44, no. 3 (March, 1975), p. 46f; *Westminster Theological Journal,* XXX VIII, I(Fall, 1975), p. 43ff.
8. E.J. Young, *op. cit.*
9. The Septuagint quotations are to the point not only because they were written in Greek, but also because Luke's biblical quotations appear to be based on the Septuagint. Of course, it is well known that the so-called Septuagint is a composite of several translations of the Old Testament. We have used A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Priveleg. Württ. Bibelanstalt, 1959).
10. Cf., Appendix VI, "Dreams and Visions."
11. Appendix VII, "Darkening of Sun, Moon, etc."
12. P. Robertson, "Do Not Forbid to Speak in Tongues," *Presbyterian Guardian,* vol. 44, no. 5 (May, 1975), p. 76f.
13. Cf., I.A.l, pp.38-41.
14. Robertson, *op. cit.,* p. 46f.
15. Someone might respond that "tongues" although in the world was heavenly language citing I Cor. 13:1 "tongues of men and of angels." Let it be noted that there are

several recorded instances of angelic speaking in the Bible and every one of them is in a known human language. To suppose that spiritual beings are limited in communication between themselves to using physical apparati in a manner different than that which is the regular pattern in Scripture is most presumptuous indeed.

16. Cf., I.A.1., pp. 38-41.
17. Cf., Robertson, *op. cit.*
18. *Ibid.,* p.46.
19. *lbid.,* p. 49.
20. *Ibid.,* p. 51f. This writer cannot follow Robertson's suggested exegesis of I Cor. 14:22 because: *1* the "wherefore, so" introduces the entire verse and leads one to take the two halves thereof as parallel, *2* the second half of the verse is shown to be the parallel of the first, moreover, in that it depends on the first half for its predicate, *3* in both halves there is an obvious parallel in general structure, except that the last half omits "is for a sign." For these reasons the predicate "is for a sign" seems to naturally go with the second half.
21. There is a minor difficulty in the Hebrew text. "Would not" is spelled '*abû'*. The final *aleph* is probably a vowel lengthener (cf., Ps. 75:6, *sû'r-sûr*). Someone might want to read '*abô'*, "I shall come." This is not possible because of the context and because of the translation in I Cor. 14:21.
22. Hebrew, *menuha,* "place of rest."
23. The fact that tongues is the Gospel declared in foreign languages leads one to see here a reversal of the Babel episode (cf., Gen. 11).
24. Robertson, *op. cit.,* p. 50.
25. *Ibid.,* p.48.
26. W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* 4th ed (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago

Press, 1952), p. 168.

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