

The Gift of Tongues For Today or Not?

What Does the Bible Say?

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First Things First

The gift of tongues is a very controversial subject. It can even be a divisive issue. Yet the reality of this gift's operation among the early first-century Believers cannot be denied. References to the different operations of this gift are numerous in Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament). We shall explore some of these references later.

Several main issues are at the center of the debate on the gift of tongues. First, is it a gift of the Spirit that is still in operation today among followers of Yeshua the Messiah, or did its operation cease after the first century? Some say it did not, some say it did—hence, a difference of opinion leading to debate and division.

Second, is what is commonly called the “gift of tongues” in some Christian churches today really the genuine gift of tongues or is it simply a manifestation of emotionalism on the part of those who claim to have the gift, or worse, is it actually the evidence of demonic activity? Some well-meaning individuals take one side of this issue, while others take the opposite point of view.

Finally, is speaking in tongues necessary for salvation? Some Christian denominations say it is, most say it is not. A vigorous debate surrounds this issue, as well.

For the record, and in all honesty, this author well into his adult life as a Christian was strident in his belief that the gift of tongues had ceased in the first century, that what was called the gift of tongues today in many churches was either a function of hype and emotionalism or a demonic counterfeit. What changed this author's mind on the subject of tongues was not a visit to a tongues-speaking Pentecostal or Charismatic church, but a study of the Word of YHVH. Actually, he was challenged to look into the subject by a fellow (non-tongues-speaking Believer), and in attempts to disprove his friend we became convinced that the gift was for today. This was in spite of the fact that he had never visited a tongues-speaking church, nor had he ever heard anyone speak in tongues.

Also, let us state up front that this author does *not* believe that speaking in tongues is necessary for salvation. Like the other gifts of the Spirit of YHVH Elohim described in 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14, it is a gift from YHVH given as he wills to those who want it. Like all free gifts from our Father in heaven (e.g., salvation or healing, for example) those who don't want it will not get it. Some want all that he has for his children and will seek it with all their hearts; some out of fear, unbelief, ignorance, religious tradition, peer pressure or whatever will not seek more from YHVH but will instead choose to remain content in their spiritual comfort zones. This is a choice each person makes. YHVH in his love and grace will work with us at whatever place we find ourselves. It is up to us to go where he leads us, and at the same time, be loving and gracious to others who may not agree with us.

With “cards” laid on the table, let us proceed with the subject of the gift of tongues and endeavor to ascertain whether this gift is still in operation today.

Truth or Tradition?

Let's dive right into this controversial subject and ask ourselves an important question: Is all of YHVH's Word for us today or not? Do we believe in his Word—from Genesis to Revelation, or do we believe that parts of it have passed away and are no longer relevant for us today?

Many well-meaning Bible Believers would say that they agree that *all* of YHVH's Word is for us today, but on closer examination, in reality, many, in accordance with their religious traditions, have exchanged many biblical

truths for man-made traditions. This is a place we can find ourselves in without having really thought about it. In fact, until our beliefs and traditions are challenged, most of us give what we believe and do very little thought. We simply follow the religious crowd of which we are a part.

In numerous places in Scripture, YHVH lovingly calls his people sheep, and Yeshua is, of course, called the Good Shepherd. In one place YHVH says that his sheep have gone astray (Isa 53:6) and in another place Yeshua says that his sheep have become lost and that he will regather them (Matt 10:6 and 15:24). Probably all of us unwittingly have been guilty of following spiritual leaders, denominations, our friend's or family's religious traditions until we found out that it was the blind leading the blind. It was when we realized our condition that we actually began reading and studying what the Word of Elohim had to say on a subject only to find out that what we were taught did not line up with Scripture. This can be a painful process, but it is an essential part of spiritual growth. Yeshua, in a sense, predicted this very process when he promised to send his Spirit after his resurrection and ascension. He said that the Comforter whom he would send would lead his disciples into *all truth* (John 16:13).

YHVH's Truth Does Not Change

When YHVH's Spirit teaches his people truth, that truth does not change. Truth cannot change. Truth is truth. It can't be truth one day, not truth the next day. The truths revealed in Scripture do not change either. Men change, but YHVH's truth does not change. This is a fundamental truth of Scripture.

If it appears to us that the truths of Scripture have changed, we would be wise to look again, for it is most likely that our understanding of the Scripture is lacking. Yeshua said that Scripture *cannot* be broken, unloosed or destroyed (John 10:35). We believe that *all* of Scripture is inspired and YHVH-breathed (2 Tim 3:16). If we assume this to be correct, then we as born-again believers are duty-bound to obey *all* of YHVH's instructions, to the best of our ability. We do not have the prerogative to pick and choose what we want to accept or not. All Scripture is relevant, it is all truth and it is all for us. There is no middle ground—no gray areas!

Has the Truth About the Gift of Tongues Changed?

The gift of tongues was a gift and a truth given to the early Believers. Unless we doubt the biblical record, this is truth. Logically, if the truth of the gift of tongues has ceased, then what other biblical truths have ceased, as well? Yeshua lists the gift of tongues as a sign that follows those who preach the gospel message (Mark 16:17) and Paul lists it as one of the nine gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12. Now if the gift of tongues ceased could we not logically say that the other things Yeshua mentions that would be aspects of the "Great Commission" (Mark 16:15–18) also cease? If so what parts? Do we no longer have power to cast out demons? Do we no longer have divine protection and power over demonic powers as we preach the gospel? Do we no longer have to make disciples and baptize new converts? Perhaps, we are not even to go into all the world and to preach the gospel, as he commanded. All these are aspects of his Great Commission command—along with speaking in tongues.

How about the gifts of the Spirit? If the gift of tongues has ceased, perhaps the other eight gifts have, as well. Indeed, there are those in our day who say that they have and they give various reasons for believing this. But isn't this a dangerous game to play? If *one* normative truth can be excised from Scripture, what will stop us from changing or eliminating *any* truth that doesn't suit us? Where does it stop?

Picking and choosing what truths from Scripture to follow, or re-interpreting Scripture to make it suit our fancies is a slippery slope! Many in religious circles in the last days who are doing just that are ending up with some very dangerous and anti-biblical belief systems. Some are justifying some very pernicious and lascivious lifestyles on this basis. We admit, these may be extreme examples to justify our point, but loving YHVH's truth is essential to standing firm in the last days against those religious and societal pressures that would attempt to persuade and even intimidate Believers away from the rock-solid and immutable truth of YHVH's Word. Paul warns against this very thing in 1 Thessalonians 2:10–12. He prophesies that some who do not love the truth of YHVH as they should will "buy in" to some very strong spiritual delusion.

Are We Guilty of Ripping Pages Out of the Bible?

By believing that certain truths in the Bible are passé one has, in effect, ripped pages from the Bible and thrown them away. Such activity is a form of humanism, for it is tampering with the truth and the revealed Word or truth of YHVH Elohim.

The religion of secular humanism extant on earth today endeavors to elevate the mind of man above Elohim by picking and choosing what parts of Elohim's Word he deems acceptable to him, and what parts he wants to reject. We have all, somewhere along the line, been guilty of deciding what we want to keep from YHVH's Word and what we want to throw out; that is, what we want to obey and what we want to ignore (or disobey). Such activity is tantamount to man elevating himself up to the level of YHVH in deciding what is good and what is evil in YHVH's Word. This is an arrogant usurpation of YHVH's authority. Instead of obeying his Word, we become a judge of his Word—we judge what is good (for us to do) and what is evil (or not good for us to do). In effect, we are questioning YHVH's sovereignty and authority over our lives. This is exactly what the serpent tricked Adam and Eve into doing at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden of Eden at the beginning!

Religion in a Box: No Room for the Supernatural

The problem with much religion and many religious people is idolatry—we try to create Elohim into our own image. This is another form of humanism. This philosophy works like this: If Elohim (and his Word) does not fit into a little box that *my* mind has created for him, which accommodates the comfort zones of my limited perspective on who *I* believe him to be and what *I* am comfortable in permitting him to do, then *I* will judge and condemn other people who have not so limited YHVH Elohim, the Creator of the Universe, and who do not conform to what *I* think is right. More often than not, sadly such people are judging, not on the basis of *what Scripture says*, but on the basis of *how they feel* and what *makes their soul man comfortable*. This is a form of secular humanism and has no place in the Believer's life. It is our job as bond servants of the Most High to hear his Word and to obey it—not to make excuses why it is not relevant to my way of thinking!

Yeshua commanded his disciples to judge not according to appearance but to judge according to righteous judgment (John 7:24). Part of that judging process involves examining the fruits that are born (Matt 7:20). Are lives changed? Is there repentance? Are people converted from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light? Is faith in Yeshua deepened? Is sin overcome? Are the fruits of the Spirit manifested? When we see the gifts of the Spirit in operation, instead of rejecting them, become a fruit inspector. If they truly are of YHVH's Spirit, then fruits of edification, exhortation and comfort will occur, along with love, joy, peace, faith, hope, meekness, goodness, self-control and so on (1 Cor 14:3, 12). We would ask of those who are either opposed to the gift of speaking in tongues or those who are not sure about it to consider these points carefully before jumping to any conclusions.

Has Tongues Ceased?

So, let's ask the question again: are gifts of the Spirit of Elohim, including the gift of speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues for us today or not? Let's examine some evidence from the Word of YHVH.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:1, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant." The gift of tongues is one of the gifts to which Paul is referring in this passage. Are you, dear reader, ignorant about spiritual gifts? Don't deny it. If so, admit it and grow in your understanding in these areas. Paul obviously saw the need to teach the Believers in Corinth about spiritual gifts.

At the end of chapter 14, of 1 Corinthians, verse 39, Paul then says, "[F]orbid not to speak with tongues." After having given three chapters of instructions on the proper use and place of the gifts within the spiritual body of Messiah, and nearly an entire chapter on the gift of tongues alone, Paul's concluding remark on the subject is to encourage the proper use of the gift of tongues within the assembly. Finally, Paul states in 14:18, "I thank my Elohim, I speak with tongues more than you all . . ."

So is the gift of tongues for the Believers? Obviously, the Apostle Paul thought so. We will see next that not only did Paul command Believers to desire all the gifts of the Spirit, but that the cessationist view of the gifts (i.e., the notion that they passed away after the first century) is an incorrect view scripturally.

Some will say that 1 Corinthians 13:10 seems to imply that the gifts of the Spirit have ceased when it says, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." Dr. Spiros Zodiates expresses a cessationist view of the gifts when he writes in the footnotes to this verse in his *Hebrew Greek Key Study Bible*, "It is clear from these verses that tongues no longer continue. The phrase 'when that which is perfect is come' refers to the written revelation of Scripture. When this revelation was completed, there was no need for the temporary gifts (e.g., tongues, prophecies, and knowledge) which were given in order to substantiate the message that the apostles were preaching." We see in this statement from a very learned Christian biblical scholar a rejection of a part of the inspired Word of Elohim as well as a blatant ignorance about the gifts of the Spirit and their place

in personal ministry, the assembly of Believers and their use in helping the expansion of the kingdom of Elohim. Paul clearly states that the purpose of tongues and the other speaking gifts was not for simply verifying that what the apostles were teaching was accurate, but for the edification, exhortation and comfort of the body of Believers (1 Cor. 14:3 and 12) and that it might even lead to the salvation of a nonbeliever (verses 22–25). Dr. Zodhiates doesn't even address these issues.

In opposition to the cessationist view of the gifts of the Spirit, *The Spirit Filled Life Bible* says in its footnotes to 1 Corinthians 13:10, "That which is perfect' refers to the completion of God's purposes after the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 8:18,19). There is no reason other than human opinion to presume to attribute this reference to the conclusion of the canon of the Scriptures. While the inspired Word of God was completed at the end of the first century, its completion did not signal an end to the continuing operation of the very power it describes. Rather, that Word instructs us to welcome the Holy Spirit's gifts and ministries in our lives, to round out our sufficiency for ministry to a needy world—through the Word preached and the Word confirmed [by the power of the Holy Spirit in the operation of the gifts]." It is this author's opinion that this viewpoint expresses a more comprehensive and balanced approach when considering the place of the gifts of the Spirit in the Believer's life today.

Paul Said to "Desire Spiritual Gifts"

Let's examine a few more Scriptures that shed more light on the subject of spiritual gifts.

Follow after charity, and **desire** [Greek, *zeloo*, Strong's G2206] spiritual gifts. (1 Cor 14:1)

Even so you, forasmuch as you are **zealous** [Greek, *zelotes*, Strong's G2207] of spiritual gifts, seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church. (1 Cor 14:12)

But **covet earnestly** [*zeloo* (Strong's G2206)] the best gifts (1 Cor 12: 31, emphasis added on all)

What did Paul mean by this? The Greek word for *desire* and *covet earnestly* is *zeloo* from which the English word *zealous* is derived. *Zeloo* or *zelotes* literally means "to be zealous for, to pursue ardently or to burn with desire for."

If Paul's imperative statements to *desire* and to *covet earnestly* spiritual gifts, of which the gift of tongues is one, is no longer applicable to Believers today, then what *other* parts of Paul's teachings are not for us today? Salvation by grace through faith, for example? The resurrection of the dead? The deity of Yeshua? It is not our intention here to lift up a twig of the tree (i.e., the gift of tongues) to the level of importance of the trunk (i.e., salvation by grace, the resurrection of the dead or the deity of Yeshua). We are simply using a little hyperbole here to emphasize the point that *all* of YHVH's Word is important and that it all stands and falls together. The point is that the Word of Elohim is truth. Man is to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of Elohim (Matt 4:4). The Scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35). All we want to do is to stress the point that if we can rip out one page of the Holy Word of Elohim, then there is no stopping the destruction of any part of his Word. Such an arrogant and cavalier approach to Scripture is occurring all around us among many religious folks who claim to follow the Bible.

Different Kinds of Tongues

Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 indicates that there are different aspects to the gift of tongues.

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. (1 Cor 12:10)

And Elohim has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, **diversities of tongues**. (1 Cor 12:28, emphasis added on all)

What does "diversities of tongues" mean? Many Believers who are not familiar with the gift of tongues are quick to make snap judgments about the gift without expending sufficient diligence to study the subject from a scriptural basis. Often those who are opposed to the gift of tongues will cite horror stories of how this gift has been abused in church settings. Such a negative approach is unfortunate, since the reality and operation of this and the other gifts is adequately demonstrated in the Apostolic Scriptures. It is never wise to discard the wheat for the chaff.

One of the truths about the gift of tongues is that there are "diversities of tongues." Only a cursory, but honest analysis of Scripture will substantiate Paul's statements to this effect in 1 Corinthians 12 (quoted above). The terms *kinds [of tongues]* and *diversities [of tongues]* is from the Greek word *genos* (Strong's G1085) meaning "kin or

offspring.” What are these different types of tongues or manifestations of the gift of tongues?

Some biblical expositors interpret the meaning of *diversities of tongues* as “the gift of speaking supernaturally in a language not known to the individual. The plural allows different forms, possibly harmonizing the known spoken languages of Acts 2:4–6 and the unknown translational utterances in Corinthians, designed particularly for praying and singing in the Spirit, mostly for private worship (14:14–19)” (*Spirit Filled Life Bible*, footnote to 1 Cor 12:10).

Other possible meanings for *diversities of tongues* that would not be incongruous with the above interpretation are as follows:

☞ **Tongues for Personal Edification:** This aspect of the gift of tongues is to be used in one’s private devotions. Paul references this manifestation of the gift in 1 Corinthians 14:2,4,14–18.

2 For he that speaks in an unknown tongue speaks not unto men, but unto Elohim, for no man understands him; howbeit in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

4 He that speaks in an unknown tongue edifies himself; but he that prophesies edifies the church.

14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15 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. 16 Else when you shall bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupies the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understands not what you say? 17 For you truly give thanks well, but the other is not edified. 18 I thank my Elohim, I speak with tongues more than you all ...

☞ **Tongues as a Sign to the Unbeliever:** Paul references this aspect of the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:5,6,9–13,16,19–23:

5 I would that you all spoke with tongues, but rather that you prophesied, for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying. 6 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?

9 So likewise you, except you utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken, for you shall speak into the air? 10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. 11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaks a foreigner, and he that speaks shall be a foreigner unto me. 12 Even so you, forasmuch as you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that you may excel to the edifying of the church. 13 Wherefore let him that speaks in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

16 Else when you shall bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupies the room of the unlearned say “Amen” at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understands not what you say?

19 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. 20 Brethren, be not children in understanding, howbeit in malice be you children, but in understanding be men. 21 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,” say the Lord.” 22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not, but prophesying serves not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. 23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that you are mad?

Speaking in an unknown language as a sign to unbelievers is what happened on Shavuot (Day of Pentecost) as recorded in Acts 2:

4 And they were all filled with the Set-Apart Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7 And they were all

amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? 8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of Elohim.

☞ **The Gift of Interpreting Tongues:** This gift is related to the gift of speaking in tongues since Paul lists the two together 1 Corinthians 12:10. Paul doesn't elaborate on *how* this gift operates. His letter assumes that his hearers already understood this. Since the tongues will be in a language unknown to most if not all of those in the assembly, it is likely that the interpreter will not understand the tongue either except as he receives inspiration from the Set-Apart Spirit of Elohim to "interpret" or literally "to explain" it. Even as the gift of prophecy, the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, and the gift of the discernment of spirits comes by inspiration as YHVH impresses supernatural knowledge or revelation (1 Cor 14:30) upon the human mind, we could assume that the same occurs for the gift of interpretation of tongues. As with all spiritual gifts, there is room for unscrupulous, emotionally excitable or unlearned people to misuse this gift by speaking from the flesh instead of by the spirit. It is therefore up to the leaders of the congregation and those who are spiritually mature in the use of these prophetic gifts to judge if the interpretation is correct (1 Cor 14:27-29).

What Is Glossos (Tongues)? And Does It Refer Only to Known Languages?

The word *tongue(s)* is used 50 times in the Apostolic Scriptures. It is the Greek word *glossa* (*Strong's* G1100), which literally means "the tongue (as an organ of speech), language or dialect," or figuratively as in "tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:3).

Because the word *glossa*, when referring to a language in Scripture, primarily refers to a *known* language, many well meaning Bible students insist that all speaking in tongues must be a *known* language. On this basis, those who hold to a cessationist view of this gift claim that those speaking in tongues today, unless it is a known language, are doing so falsely. This view, however, begs a rather obvious question: Unless one has a working knowledge of the some 2500 languages and dialects extant on the earth today, how does one know that the tongues one is hearing is not a known language? Beyond this, do non-earthly languages exist? What language do those in heaven at the throne of the Father speak when they cry, "Holy, holy, holy ..." and when they make other praise declarations (Rev 4:8 and 11)? Could the Apostle Paul who was caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor 12:2) where he heard unspeakable words (verse 4) be referring to other, unearthly (heavenly) languages? If so, is this what Paul could have been referring to in 1 Corinthians 13:1, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity ..."? Therefore, in light of these obvious facts, in our view, the cessationist view that the tongue being spoken has to be a language known by someone in the assembly is fallacious. It can be, but it does not have to be.

It hopefully is evident to objective students of this subject that Scripture gives allowances for the gift of tongues to be evidenced in a language that one personally may not know, or in a language that no other human knows either, such as an angelic heavenly language. It is the Father in heaven who gives good gifts to his children (Matt 7:11; Luke 11:13) as he wills to do so (1 Cor 12:11). The giving of a gift is based on the discretion and generous good will of the donor and it is not the prerogative of the receiver to demand of the giver *how*, *when* or in *what manner* the gift will be given. The same is true of the all gifts of the Spirit of Elohim as imparted by our Heavenly Father.

What Is the Purpose of the Gift of Tongues?

Man has developed languages to primarily help him in every day life. Languages have evolved to describe physical events and phenomenon, express human emotions, thoughts, ideas, and to help man to live and function on this earth. Language is a function of the mind of man. He cannot invent words to express thoughts that are beyond his capability to comprehend. Even when gazing through a giant telescope into the vastness of the universe, or when peering through an electron microscope at some of the smallest particles of matter, the mind of man struggles to put into comprehensible language those things which are almost infinitely small or large.

If the mind of man can be stretched to its utmost in the physical realm, how will it fare in the realm of the

supernatural or spiritual? Paul echoes this sentiment in 1 Corinthians 2:9 where he quotes the ancient prophet Isaiah (Isa 64:4). He writes, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither entered into the heart of man the things which Elohim has prepared for them that love him.”

How, therefore, in our feeble-mindedness and lack of linguistic expression can we express the deep praises to YHVH that sometimes well up from within the depths of our spirit man when human words do not exist by which to adequately praise him? Are there not spiritual groanings and travailings at times deep within our soul that long to issue forth, but which defy human words to express? The gift of tongues is very helpful at times like these—for personal edification, and for bonding purposes with our Father in heaven.

Scripture tells us that when one prays in tongues in one’s times of personal devotions, one is actually speaking to YHVH (14:2). Not only that, one is speaking mysteries (verse 2), is edifying oneself (verse 4), that one’s spirit man is praying (verse 14), and that one is blessing YHVH by giving him thanks well (verses 16–17). Paul encourages those with this gift to pray for interpretation (verse 13) so that the mysteries we are speaking may be made known to our mind.

How to Receive the Gift of Tongues

To receive the gift of tongues, or any of the other gifts of the Spirit all one has to do is ask for it and then read and believe everything in Scripture that pertains to this subject. There are no formulas to receiving anything from YHVH. Simply ask in faith and believe your Heavenly Father wants you to have good gifts. Then wait for it to come. Luke 11:9–13 says,

9 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. 10 For every one that asks receives, and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened. 11 If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone, or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? 12 Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 13 If you then, being evil, know how to give **good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Set-Apart Spirit to them that ask him?** (emphasis added)

We see that on Shavuot (Pentecost) that those in attendance received what Yeshua himself called the immersion (baptism) of the Set-Apart (Holy) Spirit (Acts 1:5 and 8). For some who were present that day it was their day of being born again and receiving the immersion of the Spirit all at the same time. For others, such as the disciples, they had already received the Spirit when Yeshua blew on them (John 20:22), and so this experience of the immersion in the Spirit was an *added* impartation and empowerment for ministry purposes. Yeshua told them before he ascended, “But you shall receive power, after that the Set-Apart Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The immersion in the Spirit is for the purpose of being empowered to go forth and to fulfill the Great Commission of preaching the good news of the kingdom of heaven.

In the Book of Acts, we see four occasions where the Spirit was poured out:

- ☞ To the Jewish believers in Jerusalem on Shavuot (Acts 2:2–4)
- ☞ To those in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17)
- ☞ To the Gentiles (Acts 10:44–48)
- ☞ To John the Baptist’s disciples (Acts 19:6)

We see here that the Spirit was poured out to the exact people-groups and in the exact order that Yeshua stated in Acts 1:8; namely, first to the Jews, then to those in Samaria and then to the gentiles. Each people-group received the empowerment of YHVH’s Spirit to advance the gospel in the power of the Spirit to a demonized world. In three of these four cases, the gift of tongues accompanied the pouring out of the Spirit. In one case (Acts 8:14–17), Scripture does record that they spoke in tongues. We will discuss this anomaly more later.

Is Speaking In Tongues *the* or *an* Initial Evidence of Receiving the Baptism of the Spirit?

This is a controversial subject. Some Bible teachers who believe in the gift of tongues say yes, and others say no.

The fact is that in three of the four examples listed above where the Book of Acts records that Believers received the baptism of the Spirit that event was accompanied by the recipients receiving the gift of speaking in tongues. With those in Samaria in Acts 8 there is no record that they spoke in tongues, though the implications

are great that they did. Whether or not this was the case, joy and a worshipful heart were assuredly initial evidences of this overflowing and empowering work of the Spirit in the Believer's life (Acts 2:13; 8:8; Eph 5:18–20). In one instance, the spirit of prophecy was poured out (Acts 19:6).

Whatever the initial evidence was, whether tongues, joy, a worshipful and thankful heart or prophesying, those who received it were different and that difference was evident for all to see. If one has received the baptism of the Spirit one will know it, and so will those around them. If some dramatic changes have occurred in your life such as manifesting the gifts of the Spirit, a desire to win the lost, greater joy, and a greater ability to hear the voice of YHVH—to be “led of the Spirit,” then most likely you have received it, though that is *not* to say that if you did not that you are not born again, as the disciples were prior to the Acts 2 event when they received the Spirit from Yeshua in John 20:22.

We would add one additional thought on this matter. If one truly wants *all* that YHVH has for them including a total immersion or overflowing of the Spirit, then YHVH's Spirit will fill every nook and crevice in one's life. One will hold no part of one's life back from YHVH and every part of one's being will be in tune with him including one's tongue.

It seems unlikely that one would be overflowed and empowered with the Spirit in the manner we have been discussing above and which Yeshua termed as the baptism or immersion of the Spirit with power (Acts 1:5 and 8) and not receive the gift of speaking in tongues. After all, when the promised baptism of the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the Book of Acts records that “they were *all* filled with the Set-Apart Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:4). Notice that they *all* spoke in tongues. Despite this, we still have the account of Believers receiving the baptism of the Spirit in Acts 8:14–17, yet no mention is made of them speaking in tongues. What can we therefore deduce from the evidence before us? We would say that in most cases, speaking in unknown tongues is an initial evidence of receiving the baptism of the Spirit, but not in all cases. YHVH may be *giving* the gift, but for one reason or another the recipient may not be ready to *receive* it yet. For those who have been baptized in the Spirit, but have not received their heavenly prayer language, we encourage them to keep seeking it until they are able or willing to receive it.

The Gift of Tongues In the Congregational Setting

We have already seen how the gift of tongues was a blessing on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Conversely, we see that it was abused and engendered confusion in the congregation at Corinth such that Paul had to write to them with some corrective instructions (1Cor 14).

One thing is certain, Paul is clear that public pronouncements in tongues does not belong in the congregational setting unless there is interpretation (14:27–28). However, it appears that in 1Corinthians 14:15 he is speaking of praying and singing in the spirit (i.e., in tongues) in the congregational setting. Therefore, it appears that Paul is not forbidding the use of tongues for worshipful singing or praying as long as it does not engender confusion, but is done in a peaceful (Greek, harmonious, tranquil) manner (verse 33). *The Spirit Filled Life Bible* in its commentary notes on verse 15 states, “It is not clear whether or not corporate singing, praising, or praying in tongues would be permitted or denied by Paul. What is clear is that no individual or group of individuals should so sing or pray in violation of leadership, the spirit of the group as a whole, or the intent of the meeting. Differences exist in the acceptance of ‘singing in tongues’ in corporate gatherings of believers. Some adhere to a strict disallowance of group exercise of this gift in concert, while others feel that ‘order’ is not violated if the exercise is explained and nonfanatical expression maintained.”

In 1Corinthians 14:23, Paul states another use of tongues in the congregational setting. “If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that you are mad?” What he is saying here is that tongues for personal edification (one's own personal spiritual prayer language) may be exercised in a group gathering by corporate agreement if there are present no unbelievers or uninformed individuals as to what is going on so as not to be a stumbling block to them. Such a prayer meeting can facilitate the spiritual edification or breakthroughs of the individuals attending. Often praying or singing in tongues will enhance the spiritual sensitivity of the individual to the moving of the Spirit. As one gets “in tune” with the heart of the Father other gifts of the Spirit will often manifest such as the gift of prophecy, word of knowledge, word of wisdom or the gift of discernment of spirits.

Should the Gift of Tongues Be Elevated Above the Other Gifts?

Nowhere does Scripture elevate this gift above the others, but because it is easy to abuse, to manufacture, or to fake it can become a sign of pride and status among carnal individuals. In fact, because of its abuse, the Apostle Paul had to correct the Corinthian believers in their abuse of this gift (1 Cor 14, the whole chapter). What's more, Paul encourages the gift of prophecy *over* the gift of tongues in the congregational setting (14:3–5).

Can You Be Saved and Not Speak In Tongues?

When Yeshua breathed upon his disciples and he said, “Receive you the Set-Apart Spirit” (John 20:22) they were saved at that time, but not yet empowered to do the work of the ministry (i.e. fulfill the Great Commission that Yeshua had just given to them). This is evidenced by the fact that they immediately went fishing (returned to their secular jobs, John. 21:3) after having received the Spirit, instead of immediately going out to preach the gospel with the signs and wonders following (Mark 16:15–18). Upon Yeshua's last appearance to the disciples, as recorded in Acts 1, he commanded them to stay in Jerusalem saying, “But you shall receive power, after that the Set-Apart Spirit is come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It was this “Baptism of the Spirit” that launched the disciples into a powerful outreach ministry with signs and wonders following. We have no records of them ever going back to fishing for fish again—only “fishing” for lost souls.

The Greatest Gift of All: LOVE

No place in all of Scripture gives more instructions about the gifts of the Spirit in general and the gift of tongues in particular than in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. Yet sandwiched between these two chapters is chapter 13—commonly referred to as “The Love Chapter.” It is one of the most often quoted passages of Scripture, and rightly so.

Everything in the Bible proceeds from the premise of love—the love of our Heavenly Father for his children. He sets the standard and we are to follow his example. After all, is he not the one who *so loved* the world that he sent to earth his only begotten Son to die for our sins (John 3:16)? Did he not *love* us while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8)? Did not Yeshua himself sum up all of the 613 Torah commandments with the following phrase: Love YHVH with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:29–31)? The Bible tells us that YHVH Elohim *is* love (1 John 4:8,16). The word *love* is used 305 times in the Bible—181 times in the Apostolic Scriptures alone.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul said, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, 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 love, I am nothing.” The point is that love should always be the greatest character attribute of a child of YHVH regardless of the level of spiritual giftedness at which one operates. Love is *the* distinguishing mark of the true disciples of Yeshua (John 13:35), not whether one speaks in tongues, does miracles or prophesies. Without love—without a selfless concern for others, for their edification and betterment—whatever else we do, no matter how noble it may be, counts as nothing in YHVH's estimation. Never is it the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit to cause strife and division within the congregational setting. **It is a greater act of love to hold one's tongue than to let it go at the risk of causing offense.** If there are questions about the gift of tongues such as when to use it, how, where or other concerns, one needs to seek counsel and direction from the head elder or shepherd of the congregation.

The gifts of the Spirit cannot operate apart from a foundation and framework of the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, Gal 5:22–23). Pride is a work of the flesh and YHVH hates it (Prov 6:16–17). The gifts of the Spirit should always operate out of a heart of humility, self control and love.

Testimonies of Those Who Have Received the Gift of Speaking In Tongues

Over the years this author has heard countless uplifting and YHVH-glorifying testimonies of those who have genuinely received the gift of tongues. Likewise, the author has heard of and experienced those who have abused this gift and used it for self-glorifying, carnal purposes. It is hard to imagine that the latter could be anything more than a soulish impersonation of the Holy Spirit, and not the real thing.

Be that as it may, we would like to share with the reader several testimonies of individuals who we know personally and have heard their testimonies of having been powerfully blessed through the gift of tongues. We hope you are blessed and encouraged by these testimonies.

☞ Testimony of Pastor Bill J.

Pastor J. was saved during the early 1970s during the famous Jesus People Movement where many hippies and other social outcasts turned from their profligate lifestyles and became born-again Christians. He was just such an individual who had no Christian upbringing, but heard the message of the gospel, responded and was promptly born again, baptized in the Holy Spirit speaking in tongues while visiting a church one day. It happened all at once as a single event. No one prompted him to speak in tongues, nor had he ever heard of this experience. It just happened spontaneously as a result of getting saved. He is now in his late 50s, pastors a medium-sized denominational church, and has been pastoring for nearly 30 years.

☞ Testimony of Mike T.

Mike T. is Jewish, but was nonreligious. His wife was a born-again Believer who attended church regularly. Mike attended with her, but was not a born-again Believer. Finally the gospel message began to touch his heart and at the church's annual adult retreat he went forward to receive Yeshua as his Lord and Savior. At the same time he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit whereupon he began to speak in tongues. The language he was speaking was unknown to him and to everyone else present, except for one man, one of the church elders (Richard M. who this author also knows personally) who is an engineer who spent time in Saudi Arabia and learned Arabic. It happened that Mike T, a Jewish man who had just met his Messiah, was praising YHVH, via tongues, in Arabic.

☞ Testimony of Lyn L.

Lyn L. went forward in church one day to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gift of speaking in tongues. She was prayed for and immediately she felt coming up from deep within her a new spiritual prayer language, which literally flowed up and out of her like a river. She was not coached or prompted to do so. It just happened. That was many years ago, and her life has been blessed ever since with this gift.

☞ Testimony of Rabbi Haim L.

Rabbi L. was raised as an orthodox Jew and went to Yeshiva in New York City and was ordained there as an Orthodox Rabbi and became a member of the Orthodox Union. In 1974 he went to a Pentecostal church out of curiosity where a woman was speaking in tongues. No one in the church knew what she was saying ... except Rabbi L. She was praising Yeshua, her Lord, Savior and Messiah in Hebrew. Rabbi L. found out that this lady did not know Hebrew, and that he was the only one there who did. He realized that this was a miracle and that the message was for him. Needless to say, Rabbi L. fled the church afterwards in fear and dismay, but shortly afterwards, he accepted Yeshua as his Messiah and has been a leader in the Messianic Jewish movement in North and South America, and has been pastoring a Pentecostal Messianic Jewish congregation ever since.

☞ James L.

James L. received the baptism of the Spirit many years ago at a church meeting. Being the intellectual type, he had a hard time receiving the gift of tongues though he wanted it. Previous to this he had tried on several occasions, on his own, to speak in tongues, but nothing had happened. But at this meeting after receiving the baptism of the Spirit in a most powerful way he was encouraged by a church worker to start praising YHVH in an unknown language which James L. did. There were no feelings, no welling up of tongues from deep within, no automatic utterings forth, just a quiet faith that what he was doing was indeed the gift of tongues. But because there had been no overwhelming experience James L. always questioned whether he had actually received the gift of tongues or whether it had only been his imagination.

One day some years later, James L., who was now a preacher and evangelist, was directed by the Spirit to go a large, international New Age conference sponsored by many New Age churches from around country. He went with a pastor, an intercessor and another evangelist. At this convention this team of born-again Believers surreptitiously placed gospel tracts everywhere and were at the same time praying for the failure of the conference.

While there, James L. and his evangelist partner happened upon the convention's prayer chapel.

Inside and alone, they began to pray against the New Age religion and that convention in particular. It wasn't long before an evil spirit attacked James L. in his mind and body. A dark and demonic fog began to come over James L's mind and he felt weak in his body as if he were going to pass out. He was even unable to speak in English, for a paralysis was coming over him. This all happened in about 30 to 45-seconds time. By now, the power had virtually overcome James L. and he could not think clearly. Not knowing what to do he immediately began to pray loudly in tongues and the evil presence immediately lifted and James L. instantly regained his normal senses and strength, much to his relief.

From that point on, the New Age meeting was a failure. The sound system would not work. The keynote speakers couldn't get their thoughts collected, things were falling over on the stage and only half the number of people showed up at the conference as the planners had expected. Needless to say, James L. never again doubted the validity of his receiving the gift of tongues.

