

# — Tongues In The Book of Acts —

By Donald S. Metz

Professor of Religion, Bethany Nazarene College

Bethany, Oklahoma

The interest of the Church in "speaking in tongues," sometimes called "glossolalia," is one of the notable aspects of twentieth-century religious life. Some who are members of old and staid denominations, college and university students, businessmen and preachers have shown a serious concern for this experience.

We do not question the fact that many devout people have had an experience involving some kind of ecstatic utterance. We do challenge the assertion that "without the evidence of speaking in tongues there can be no fully scriptural baptism with the Holy Ghost."

Because the supporters of the doctrine of speaking in tongues claim a biblical basis for their teachings, it appears that the best way to deal with the problem is to examine the Scriptures. The two primary sources of biblical statements regarding speaking in tongues are found in the Book of Acts and in I Corinthians.

There are three references to speaking in tongues in Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6. In addition there are several references to the actual coming, or filling, of or with the Holy Spirit in Acts 4:31; 8:17; 9:17; 13:9. Since speaking in tongues when it did occur is related to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, all the above references must be discussed.

1. Acts 2:4. "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." Three things may be said about this verse: First, the people spoke in known languages, for "every man heard them speak in his own language" (2:6).

Second, speaking in previously unlearned languages was one of three physical manifestations on the Day of Pentecost. For sound as of a wind and visible tongues as of fire were also in evidence. If one is going to insist on a literal reproduction of Pentecost in every Spirit-baptized Christian, then all three evidences ought to be present, not just one.

Finally, the three physical manifestations at Pentecost indicate the beginning of a new dispensation — that of the Holy Spirit. As God introduced the law at Mount Sinai amid rolling thunder and flashing lightning, so God initiated a new era of grace by evidences to eye and ear. As the symbols at Sinai passed, leaving a permanent ethical and spiritual law, so the symbols at Pentecost passed, leaving a permanent ethical and spiritual state of grace called holiness, or heart purity. At Pentecost the wind symbol indicated God's power, the fire symbol witnessed to God's purging power, and the speaking symbol revealed the universality of the gospel in the new Church age.

2. Acts 4:31. Here there is a record of Christians filled with the Holy Spirit without speaking in tongues. This verse seems to contradict the Pentecostal teaching that "in Acts, the speaking with tongues is always the direct result of the filling with the Spirit."

The attempt has been made to explain this event as only a refilling of the disciples. But such an explanation is weak and strained. In Acts 4:4 there is a record of five thousand men won to Christ. These five thousand are the majority of the ones who were filled with the Holy Spirit — without speaking in tongues.

3. Acts 8:17. The revival in Samaria also illustrates the coming of the Holy Spirit without the evidence of speaking in tongues. Peter and John went to Samaria and found a full-scale revival in progress under the preaching of Philip. When Peter and John laid their hands on the new converts, "they received the Holy Ghost" — without speaking in tongues.

The King's Highway

Because Simon tried to purchase the power to convey the Holy Spirit on people, the point is made by some that "circumstantial evidence" indicates that the people must have spoken in tongues. But direct witness and direct teaching, not circumstantial surmises, are necessary to support the statement that "in every instance where the believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit after Pentecost they spoke in tongues."

4. Acts 9:17 and 13:9. Shortly after his conversion Paul went to Damascus, where he received the Holy Spirit. Here again there is no specific reference to speaking in tongues, although some associate I Corinthians 14:18 with Paul's experience in Damascus. But the fact remains that, in the Book of Acts, Paul received the Holy Spirit without a specific reference to speaking in tongues.

5. Acts 10:46. Eight years after Pentecost, Peter reluctantly accepted an invitation to preach at the home of Cornelius, a Gentile. While Peter preached, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" (10:44). Peter was amazed, "For they heard them speak with tongues" (10:46). This experience is sometimes called the Gentile Pentecost.

Scholars disagree as to the meaning of "tongues" in this instance, but it is logical to accept tongues here to mean the same as in Acts 2:4, since the same author is using the same word and does not indicate any difference in meaning. Further, the effect on Peter indicates that it was not an unknown tongue, but a language. For when he recounts the event later Peter says, "... the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning" (11:15). "And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us, and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:8-9). It was on the basis of this baptism that the Gentiles were fully accepted into the Church.

6. Acts 19:6. When Paul went to Ephesus he found converts who had not progressed in the Christian life. Paul immediately baptized them, laid his hands on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Commentators such as Adam Clarke connect speaking in tongues and prophesying here — regarding it as the proclamation of the gospel in known languages.

In Acts there are six references to people receiving the Holy Spirit. In the first case (2:4) the people spoke in known languages. In the second, third, and fourth instances (4:31; 8:17; 9:17; and 13:9) there is no record of speaking in tongues. In the fifth and sixth cases (10:46; 19:6) the people spoke in tongues, but in these instances the phenomena came as a confirmation and can be assumed to mean a language, as at Pentecost.

The conclusion is that the Book of Acts does not support the claim that speaking in tongues should accompany the baptism in, or with, the Holy Spirit.

—The Herald of Holiness

## THE MIGHTY MINORITY

Revival and Reformation will come only in the hands of the few against the power of the many. What we need today, if we want a deeply spiritual revival, is not large numbers and sensational evangelism, but a minority—be it ever so small—a mighty minority of true believers who with passionate devotion will set themselves to seek the Lord for a revival of moral righteousness.

—Peter Eldersweld