[Are Tongues For Today?](http://savedbygrace.com/spiritual-gifts/tongues/tongues-today)

[Tongues](http://savedbygrace.com/category/spiritual-gifts/tongues)

**Opening Text: Acts 2:1-20**

In this lesson we will learn 3 things:

1. Tongues were for Israel.
2. Tongues were temporary in nature.
3. Tongues would cease upon the completion of the word of God.

**Introduction:**

Before we look at the above 3 points let us ask the question “What are tongues?”

* Some people think that tongue talking is speaking gibberish.
* Some people believe that it is currently going on today and is one of the signs of salvation.
* Some people think that God is speaking to them and giving them direct revelation apart from the word of God.

But what does the Bible say tongues are? The Bible clearly teaches that tongues were known languages.

“But what about ‘unknown tongues’ in 1 Corinthians 14?”, you may ask.

If we apply what we already know from Acts 2, that tongues are known languages, then 1 Corinthians 14 is not a problem. Paul is simply bawling out the carnal Corinthians for misuse of the gift of tongues.

**Verse by verse commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:**

***1 Cor 14:1****Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.*

**COMMENT:** After telling the Corinthians in Chapter 13 that tongues would cease, Paul now directs them to follow after prophecy, or preaching.

***1 Cor 14:2****For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.****1 Cor 14:3****But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*

**COMMENT:** Again, a logical argument arises. If there is no one who can understand you but God, then it would be better to speak so that man can be edified, or built up in the faith.

***1 Cor 14:4****He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.*

**COMMENT:** It is better to edify the church than just one member of it. Keep in mind here that **no one in the assembly** could understand this tongue that was being used. It is unknown only in the sense that no one there knew what was being said.

**For example:** If I were to walk into a German, French, or some such assembly and begin to speak to them in American (we speak American, not English), and no one there understood American, what good would it do them, though I gave them the whole counsel of God? The answer is none.

***1 Cor 14:5*** *I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.*

**COMMENT:** It is readily apparent that prophesying was more edifying than talking in tongues.

***1 Cor 14:6****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?*

**COMMENT:** Again the great apostle to the Gentiles makes the same argument.

***1 Cor 14:7****And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?****1 Cor 14:8****For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?****1 Cor 14:9****So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.*

**COMMENT:** Yet another illustration of the frustration of tongues.

***1 Cor*** ***14:10****There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.****1 Cor*** ***14:11****Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.*

**COMMENT:** Rather than commend the misuse of this gift, which is how it is practiced today in America, Paul all but calls it barbaric: the opposite of civilized. In other words, Paul was saying only a bunch of barbarians would go around speaking things that no one in the speaker’s vicinity could understand, and then brag about it!!!

***1 Cor*** ***14:12****Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*

**COMMENT:** This is the **3rd time** now that Paul has returned to this theme. Again, he does not commend the use of tongues. He is commending edification which, apparently from this passage, was not being accomplished through tongues. If I tell even our young folks that it is better to do one thing than to do another, they understand perfectly well what is meant. So many today fight and wrangle with these verses trying to make them say what they do not say.

***1 Cor*** ***14:13****Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.****1 Cor*** ***14:14****For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.****1 Cor*** ***14:15****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.****1 Cor 14:16****Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?****1 Cor*** ***14:17****For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.*

**COMMENT:** The issue is the edification of the believer. Speaking in tongues in the Corinthian church was not edifying, and Paul recommends against it in favor of edification.

***1 Cor*** ***14:18****I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:*

**COMMENT:** Many contend that this is a reference to Paul’s personal, private prayer life and, therefore, it is ok to practice at home. This is a wild leap of imagination. The correct use of tongues was to reach the lost, as we shall see shortly.

***1 Cor 14:19****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.*

**COMMENT:** This is the 5th time that Paul returns to this argument of edification. This time he makes it very plain that, “in the church”, speaking with understanding is preferred above speaking in tongues.

By the way, do you know what 5 words Paul would rather speak, clearly and distinctly so everyone could hear? I am guessing, of course, but I think they might be, “Christ died **FOR** our sins”.

***1 Cor*** ***14:20****Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.*

**COMMENT:** Paul now reasons with them not to be children. “Do not shoot out the lip because I am taking away your toy. Grow up and be men in understanding.”

***1 Cor 14:21****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, saith the Lord.****1 Cor*** ***14:22****Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.*

**COMMENT:** Paul now turns his attention to the purpose originally given for the use of the gift of tongues: the salvation of the nation of Israel. The Jews required a sign. They were sign-oriented people. The way they knew that God was working in their midst was through the use of signs. This principle holds true throughout the law. Signs were a part of their heritage and birthright. If God was speaking to them, signs would follow.

When lost Israel sees the Gentiles practicing their gifts, God uses this to provoke some to salvation. This is part of the “provoking ministry of Paul”. This sign, talking in tongues, would be done away with for 2 very good reasons.

1. Israel would be set aside because of unbelief.
2. The completion of the canon of scripture.

Now this all begs a question, which Paul logically asks in verse 23.

***1 Cor 14:23****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****ye are mad?******1 Cor 14:24******But if all prophesy****, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned,****he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:******1 Cor 14:25****And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.*

**COMMENT:** The question that must be asked is this: If tongues are for a sign to the unbelievers, why was it being practiced in the church? It needed to be practiced outside in the world where it could be used effectively. The same is true today. If you want to hear people “speak in tongues”, you have to go to their worship services. I have had Mormons, Church of Christ, Baptists, and Russellites (or Jehovah’s Witnesses) come to my door and talk to me, but I have never had a Pentecostal come to my door and speak to me in tongues. Why?

1. Today it is gibberish and means nothing.
2. It is of the flesh.

There is nothing spiritual about it, and this whole chapter proves that very point. The purpose of tongues was to reach lost Israel through the manifestation of the Spirit in the believer. The Corinthians were not using it that way.

***1 Cor*** ***14:26****How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*

**COMMENT:** This verse demonstrates the carnality evidenced in Corinth and across America today. No understanding. No edification. Just a flesh and emotion feast.

***1 Cor 14:27****If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.****1 Cor*** ***14:28****But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*

**COMMENT:** *Terms and Conditions – Part 1:* Notice again the problem here is with the unknown tongue, a language that no one in the congregation could recognize. Also notice that, under the decently and in order rule, one would not get up and start speaking in an unknown tongue without first making sure there was an interpreter present. If not, he (not she, because women were not allowed to speak, much less speak in tongues) was to **keep silence**.

***1 Cor*** ***14:29****Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.****1 Cor*** ***14:30If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.******1 Cor*** ***14:31****For ye may all prophesy****one by one****, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.****1 Cor*** ***14:32****And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.****1 Cor*** ***14:33****For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*

**COMMENT:** *Terms and Conditions – Part 2:* The prophets are to speak first, as many as 2 or 3, and another was to judge, or make sure he spoke according to sound doctrine. If someone got a revelation, that is they received some light that might help the others to understand, they were to wait their turn. Notice that there are no limits. All may prophesy, **that all may learn, and all may be comforted.** This is consistent with Pauline doctrine and the context of this passage. Verse 32 simply means to gauge what is being said, the role of the judge.

***1 Cor*** ***14:34****Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.****1 Cor*** ***14:35****And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

**COMMENT:** *Terms and Conditions – Part 3:* The speaking is tongues and prophesying. They are not to interrupt the flow of things with questions. The shame comes from not being under subjection, not for being a woman. The modern tongues movement would come to a screeching halt if this one verse were obeyed.

***1 Cor*** ***14:36****What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?*

**COMMENT:** Now Paul completely deflates their ballooning pride by telling them that they are not the center of the universe. “Do you think you are the only ones in God’s plan and purpose?”

***1 Cor 14:37****If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.****1 Cor*** ***14:38****But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

**COMMENT:** Finally, the apostle to the Gentiles reminds them that if they really were spiritual, if they really were prophets, they would acknowledge him and his ministry. Such is the condition of the “professing church” today. They stumble in fettered flesh and emotionalism because they have not acknowledged the apostleship of Paul. In reference to verse 38, it is as if Paul were saying, “You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink. We can only show you the door you will have to open it and go in”.

***1 Cor*** ***14:39****Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.****1 Cor*** ***14:40****Let all things be done decently and in order.*

**COMMENT:** Paul’s closing remarks on this subject are clear and instructive. It is better to edify than not. Speaking in tongues is not to be forbidden (at that time), but clearly here, and according to the context, it was better to leave tongues out in the world where it could do the most good. “In the church” it only brings confusion.

**Conclusion:**

The Corinthians were not using tongues in the proper way and Paul commands them to put things in order. The church was to be a place of edification and education of the saints. Tongues were to be a sign to unbelievers. Paul recommends prophecy over tongues by a huge ratio. And by the way, women are not to do it.

Having said all that, let’s continue to examine what the Bible teaches about speaking in tongues:

**Tongues Were For** **Israel**

* The Twelve Apostles received the gift

***Acts*** ***1:26****And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.****Acts 2:1****And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*

* Peter quoted Joel, an Old Testament, Jewish prophet

***Acts 2:14****But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye****men of Judaea****, and all****ye that dwell at Jerusalem****, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:****Acts 2:15****For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.****Acts 2:16****But****this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel****;****Acts 2:17****And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:****Acts 2:18****And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:*

**NOTE:** There is a dispensational line to be drawn here. The following events in the passage did not come to pass in Peter’s day. They will happen after the catching away of the church, the body of Christ.

***Acts 2:19****And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:****Acts*** ***2:20****The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:*

* The Jews require a sign. They always have.

***1 Cor*** ***1:22****For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:*

**Examples:** Moses and the burning bush, Gideon’s fleece, the virgin birth, Hezekiah’s 10 degrees, etc.

Christ’s words to the scribes and the Pharisees:

***Mat*** ***12:38****Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a****sign****from thee.****Mat 12:39****But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:****Mat 12:40****For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.****Mat*** ***12:41****The men of* *Ninevehshall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

Note that the Ninevites needed no sign, just preaching.

* Tongues were prophesied.

***Jer 5:15****Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose****language****thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say.*

***Deu 28:49****The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose****tongue****thou shalt not understand;* To these people, to these Gentiles, were Israel’s gifts given to provoke them to jealousy.

***Rom*** ***11:11****I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to****provoke them to jealousy****.*

**Tongues Were Temporary In Nature**

Israel was going to be set aside as God’s agency because of her rejection of the Messiah and the Holy Spirit. God had a secret plan to bring in the revelation of the mystery. This is made evident in the book of Romans:

***Rom 11:25****For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.*

***Rom*** ***11:28****As concerning the gospel (i.e. the gospel of grace), they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.****Rom*** ***11:29****For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Rom 11:30 For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:****Rom 11:31******Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.***

**Note:** At the time of the writing of Romans, Israel could be called enemies of the gospel. Note also that in verse 31, Israel now must go through the **body of Christ** to be saved. The tables have been turned, so to speak. The middle wall of partition has been broken down.

***Eph 2:14****For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;*

Three times in the book of Acts, Paul pronounces judgment on unbelieving Israel.

1. ***Acts 13:46****Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo,****we turn to the Gentiles.***
2. ***Acts 18:6****And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean:****from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.***
3. ***Acts 28:25****And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,****Acts 28:26****Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:****Acts 28:27****For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.****Acts 28:28******Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.***

**Conclusion:** Tongues belong to Israel. When Israel is set aside, so are her signs.

**Tongues would cease for the body of Christ upon the completion of the word of God**

***1 Cor 13:8****Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

**COMMENT:** What do prophecies, tongues and knowledge (supernatural knowledge, as with tongues and prophecy) have in common? They all have to do with the transmission of the word of God. When Paul, by the Holy Spirit, penned these words, the word of God was not complete. Therefore he says, “We know in part.”

**NOTE:** The word “knowledge” used in this passage is the Greek word “**gnosis**“, which means, “to have knowledge of.” This in itself is not very significant until you turn to the book of Ephesians, where we find:

***Eph 1:17****That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the****knowledge****of him:*

This knowledge is the Greek word “**epignosis**” which means, “**full knowledge!**” When we get a completed book, we no longer need tongues, knowledge or prophecy.

***1 Cor 13:9****For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.****1 Cor*** ***13:10****But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

**COMMENT:** The Pentecostals like to say thatthis verse is a reference to the coming of Christ. First of all, it does not fit the context of the passage in any way. Secondly, it says “that which is perfect”, not “he who is perfect”, and God is able to say what He means. When the word of God is completed, that which is in part shall be done away. And isn’t that what we have with Paul completing the “revelation of the mystery”? We now, today in the year 2000, have God’s complete plan for the heavens and the earth. For the body of Christ and the nation of Israel. For the mystery program and the prophesied program.

***1 Cor*** ***13:11****When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

**COMMENT:** Did you ever grow up? Were things different when you did? That is the difference between having part, but not all, of the word of God.

***1 Cor*** ***13:12****For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

**COMMENT:** Ever look into a dirty mirror then wipe it off. That is the difference between having part, but not all, of the word of God.

One last passage:

***Col 1:24****Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church:****Col 1:25****Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to****fulfil****the word of God;****Col 1:26****Even the****mystery****which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:****Col 1:27****To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:****Col 1:28****Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:****Col 1:29****Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.*

To Paul was given the capstone of divine revelation. His epistles finish the book. And we have it in our hands today.

***2 Tim*** ***3:16****All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:****2 Tim*** ***3:17****That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

This verse nullifies tongues for this age, the dispensation of the grace of God.

* Tongues were for Israel
* Tongues were temporary in nature
* Tongues would cease upon the completion of the word of God