

Speaking In Tongues – A Sign

“Tongues then are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22).

It's commonly believed that speaking in tongues is a private prayer language but that idea is read into the text. Not a single verse states that tongues is for private prayer, however, 1 Cor. 14:21-22 clearly say that speaking in tongues was a sign. In 1 Cor. 14:21, God said, *“through men of strange tongues ... I will speak to this people”*. This is a quote from Isa. 28:11-14 in which God said that through *“foreign lips and strange tongues”* He was going to speak to, that is judge, *“this people in Jerusalem”*. Then 1 Cor. 14:22 continues on to say, *“Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers”*. From this we can see that speaking in tongues was a sign of judgement for *“this people”*, the unbelieving Jews who had rejected their Messiah. That judgement came in 70AD when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

Foreign languages were first used as a sign of judgement against the people who were building the tower of Babel. Gen. 11:1-9 tell us that, because they refused to spread throughout the world, God confused their languages and scattered them over the face of the earth.

Next, in Deu. 28, after God promised Israel that He would bless them if they were obedient, He said that if they were disobedient He would bring against them *“a nation whose language you will not understand”* (v.49). So, just as foreign languages were used as judgment against a disobedient people at Babel, they would be used as a sign of judgment against Israel if they were disobedient.

The Old Testament shows tongues being used as a sign of judgement against Israel on two occasions.

1) In Isa. 28:11-14, Isaiah prophesied that the Assyrians, a people *“with foreign lips and strange tongues”*, would be God's instrument of judgment against Israel.

2) In Jer. 5:15-17, Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonians, *“a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand”*, would be God's instrument of judgment against Judah.

Both of these prophecies were fulfilled confirming tongues as a sign of judgement.

Moving on to the New Testament, 1 Cor. 1:22 says that Jews demanded signs.

- In John 20:30-31 we are told that Jesus did signs in the presence of His Jewish disciples to prove that He was the Christ, the Messiah, and eternal life was in His name.
- Then Heb. 2:2-4 tell us that God used signs to bear witness to salvation through Jesus.

Speaking in tongues was a sign to the Jews that salvation was in Jesus, the One they crucified. There are three mentions of tongues in Acts and on each occasion Jews were present and people believed in Jesus.

Looking at the three events in Acts, we see -

(a) In Acts 2, the Jews were amazed to hear God being praised in foreign languages and three thousand were cut to the heart and believed when they heard they had crucified their Lord and Christ (Act 2:36-41).

(b) In Acts 10-11, at Cornelius' house, Peter and the other Jews who had come with him were astonished when the Gentiles believed in Jesus and spoke in tongues (Acts 10:43-47).

(c) In Acts 19:1-7, twelve Jewish disciples of John the Baptist spoke in tongues after they had believed and were baptised in Jesus' name.

In all three passages, Jews were the target of the sign of speaking in tongues and each time it pointed to belief in Jesus so it is obvious that tongues were a sign to the Jews that salvation, even for the Gentiles, was in the One they had crucified – and they would be severely judged for it.

In Matt. 24:1-2, Jesus spoke of judgement saying that the Temple would be destroyed. It was further prophesied about in 1 Cor. 14:21-22 which say that through “*men of strange tongues*” God would speak to “*this people*” and it would be a sign to them. As already said, this quote comes from Isa. 28:11-14 and this connection to previous judgement against Israel makes it obvious that speaking in tongues was a sign of future judgement against them for crucifying their Messiah. Judgement came when God used the Roman army, a “*men of strange tongues*”, to destroy Jerusalem. The sign of speaking in tongues was not likely needed beyond that point because tongues had served their purpose – judgement had come.

Finally, many believe that speaking in tongues is for private use despite 1 Cor. 12:7 and 1 Pet. 4:10 saying that all gifts are for serving others, for the common good. There is no suggestion of tongues being for private use but, as shown in this article, the Bible tells us that speaking in tongues was a sign of judgement against Israel. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, about 55AD, he said not to forbid speaking in tongues and this was simply because tongues were still being used as a sign to the Jews but once judgement came, in 70AD, the sign had served its purpose and the gift of tongues ceased. Many ignore the clearly stated purpose of speaking in tongues and force fit a ‘private prayer language’ into the text, at the expense of sound interpretation.

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All About Speaking In Tongues by an ex-Pentecostal Pastor -

<http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/tongues/allaboutspeakingintongues.pdf>

Today's Tongues by Bryce Hartin a Baptist Pastor involved in deliverance -

<http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/tongues/todaystongues.pdf>

Sola Scriptura – very good, author unknown -

http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/tongues/tongues_solascriptura.pdf

The Doctrine Of Tongues written by a New Zealand Barrister in the 1960s -

<http://www.christianissues.biz/pdf-bin/tongues/tonguesbywgbroadbent.pdf>

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