



Millions of people around the world claim to have the “gift of tongues”, and to be able to “speak in tongues”. That the Bible speaks of such a gift is beyond dispute. The New Testament books of Acts and 1 Corinthians contain historical and doctrinal information relating to this gift of the spirit. What about today? Is the miraculous gift of “speaking in tongues” still happening today?

“TONGUES” IN THE EARLY CHURCH

What Were They?

First of all, let’s consider what “speaking in tongues” was in the 1st century. When miraculous “tongues” were first spoken, **“there were devout Jews from every nation”** present in the crowd, and although **“all these people who [were] speaking [were] Galileans . . . each [person in the crowd heard] them in his own native language” (Acts 2:4-8 NAB)**. In attendance at that gathering of Jews from all around the Roman Empire were people from about 15 diverse areas, who were native speakers of about that many different languages, hearing Galilean Jews **“speak different languages as the Spirit gave them power to express themselves” (Acts 2:4 NJB)**. These speakers were empowered by the holy Spirit to miraculously speak foreign languages that they did not know. And yet, each person in the crowd heard **“them preaching in [their] own native language about the marvels of God” (Acts 2:11 NJB)**.

In confirmation of the fact that the genuine 1st century “tongues” were known foreign languages and not gibberish, we read a New Testament quote and commentary on Old Testament prophecy (**Isaiah 28:21,22**), **“God’s word says, ‘Through people who speak foreign languages and through the mouths of foreigners I will speak to these**

people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 14:21 GWT). The genuine tongues spoken in the 1st century were not confirmations that the speakers were Christians. **“Tongues are a sign not for those who believe but for unbelievers” (1 Corinthians 14:22 NAB).** *“Equating tongues with foreign languages” (NAB note on 1 Corinthians 14:20-22).*

Another Biblical rule was that genuine “tongues” spoken in a church meeting should have an interpreter. **“If anyone speaks in a tongue . . . one should interpret. But if there is no interpreter, the person should keep silent in the church” (1 Corinthians 14:27,28 NAB).**

The genuine “tongues” spoken during the 1st century were actual languages that were foreign to the speakers, but were intelligible, or understandable, to at least some, or all, of the hearers in the audience. One of the purposes of “tongues” was to communicate the gospel to people who spoke foreign languages.

Why Tongues Were Spoken

Tongues were spoken by some early Christians to demonstrate God’s approval. **“How we shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? Announced originally through the Lord, it was confirmed by those who had heard. God added his testimony by signs, wonders, various acts of power, and distributions of the gifts of the holy Spirit according to his will” (Hebrews 2:3,4 NAB).** These genuine “tongues” spoken in the 1st century were one of the ‘signs’ that God’s favor had shifted from **“Israel according to the flesh” (1 Corinthians 10:18 NAB)** to the Christian **“Israel of God” (Galatians 6:15,15 NIV).** Such a shift in God’s favor had been predicted. **“The kingdom of God will be taken away from you [Israel] and given to a people that will produce its fruit” (Matthew 21:43 NAB).**

Miraculous signs are by their very nature be rare events. There have only ever been a

handful of definite ‘sign periods’ in Scripture between which there were centuries of gaps in the dealings of God with the nation. The “sign periods” are connected with the times of: 1. Moses, 2. Elijah and Elisha, 3. Jesus Christ and his apostles.

While the Bible says there were tongues spoken by Christians in the first century, it does not say that all Christians spoke in tongues. **“All do not speak with tongues, do they?” (1 Corinthians 12:30 NASB)**. Obviously, not all, but only a few, early Christians spoke in tongues.

Cessation of Tongues Foretold

“The Spirit was conferred by the laying on of the apostles hands” (Acts 8:18 NAB). Evidently when the apostles died, the ability to pass on the miraculous powers of holy Spirit ceased. The Bible foretold this: **“Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease” (1 Corinthians 13:8 ESV)**. Why did the Biblical speaking in tongues cease?

That tongues was one of **“the signs of an apostle” (2 Corinthians 12:12)** not only shows that the gift was particularly associated with the ministry of Jesus apostles, but clearly implies that once the apostles had passed away, the accompanying ‘apostolic sign gifts’ must have passed from the scene too.

However, “tongues” ‘ceased’ because they were no longer necessary. Why not? Because **“the faith . . . was once for all handed to the holy ones” (Jude 3 NAB)**, by the complete word of God in the 66 books of the inspired scriptures, which were completed by the end of the 1st century.

History confirms that the sign gifts did indeed cease

Two quotations from the Church Fathers will be a help to establish this point:

Chrysostom of Antioch (347-407AD) commenting on [1 Corinthians 12](#) stated: “...the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as used to occur but now no longer take place.” (Post Nicene Fathers, Vol 12, Page 168)

Augustine (354-430AD) commenting on 1st John wrote: “In the earliest times, ‘the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spake with tongues’, which that had not learned, ‘as the Spirit gave them utterance’. These signs were adapted to the time. For there behoved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, to show that the gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away.” (Post Nicene Fathers, Vol 7, p. 498)

In conclusion, it is worth noting that even when the gift of tongues did exist, it was never a big issue among the churches. Out of 14 Pauline epistles, only 1 Corinthians even mentions the gift of tongues. 1 Corinthians was Paul’s 3rd epistle and was written in 57AD. There are only three historical incidents of speaking in tongues recorded in the Bible: [Acts 2:1-12](#), [Acts 10:44-48](#), [Acts 19:1-7](#). In between each of these incidence, thousands of people were saved and baptized, but none of them is said to have spoken in tongues.

IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

What Are They Nowadays?

In contrast to the genuine “tongues” spoken in the early Church,, during during [the 20th century](#) and into [the 21st century](#), there have been many who have “spoken in tongues” in churches, gatherings, and in private, but the language is gibberish, or unintelligible to the listeners. These “tongues’ are not the Biblical “tongues”, where every listener present in the room or area heard what was being spoken in their own native language, as mentioned above.

The modern day gibberish type of “tongues” are condemned by scriptural principles

regarding “tongues”. **“Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air . . . If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker” (1 Corinthians 14:9,11 NIV).**

Problems With Modern “Tongues”

If the modern day gibberish “tongues” are not from God, where do they come from? The modern “tongues” are a counterfeit production of **“Satan, the deceiver”, “the god of this world”, who “has blinded the minds” “of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9 NRSV; 2 Corinthians 4:3,4 NRSV).** . . . in accordance with how Satan works. **He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie” (2 Thessalonians 2:9 NIV).** The gibberish “tongues” spoken in modern times are sometimes simply faked by “Christians”, but most often they are spoken by a demonic power operating through a Christian.

In modern times, some groups and preachers assert that God wants, and, in fact, urge and encourage all Christians to strive to “speak in tongues”, some even claiming all Christians should strive to be ‘baptized in the holy Spirit,’ an expression they equate to seeking in “tongues’. This misrepresentation is exposed by the fact that, even in the first century, not all Christians spoke in tongues. **“All do not speak with tongues, do they?” (1 Corinthians 12:30 NASB).**

The miraculous, God-inspired “tongues” were only spoken by a very small minority of early Christians. However, all genuine Christians were baptized in the holy Spirit. **“In one Spirit we were all baptized” (1 Corinthians 12:13).** **“He is the one who will baptize with the holy Spirit. Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God” (John 1:33,34 NAB),** referring to Jesus. All Christians today can also be baptized with the holy Spirit without ever speaking in “tongues’.

How do they encourage the speaking in “tongues”? For one thing, they pray for others to receive it, and tell their listeners to pray to receive it. In contrast, however, the Bible urges all Christians to **“strive for the greater gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:31 NRSV)**, which are, **“faith, hope, and love . . . and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13 NRSV)**. Notice that “speaking in tongues” is not listed as one of the “greater gifts”.

Thus, even back in the 1st century, when this gift was legitimately operative, it was a lesser gift. **“Different kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:30 NIV)** is listed last among the **“spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 12:1 ESV)** that were operative in the early church. Several of these **“spiritual gifts”** ceased after the 1st century. These are, **“apostles . . . prophets . . . miracles . . . gifts of healing . . . different kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28 NIV)**.

Another, and more seemingly innocent, but very dangerous, way that Christians are sometimes encouraged to seek after tongues is to blank their minds, and “allow the holy Spirit to take over”. Notice the Biblical principle and warning that Jesus gave:

“When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. Then it says, ‘I will return to the person I came from.’ So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and in order. Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before.” (Matthew 12:43-45 NLT).

This illustration above by Jesus can be applied to the danger of blanking one’s mind, and not having on **“the helmet of salvation” (Ephesians 6:17)**, that is, not constantly guarding our minds from spiritual dangers. Why? Because we are warned that our **“struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against . . . the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:12 NIV)**.

Some groups do not consider a Christian as having even received the holy Spirit at all until

they have “spoken in tongues”. In contrast, however, all Christians, beginning back in the 1st century, are very much encouraged to be **“filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18)**, without anything being mentioned in this context about speaking in tongues.

Some groups consider those who have “spoken in tongues” as being more mature Christians, or closer to God, than Christians who have not “spoken in tongues”. Speaking in “tongues” seems to have been a big issue with Christians in Corinthian church, which prompted the apostle Paul to write, **“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you” (1 Corinthians 14:18 ESV)**. Even though some, or even perhaps many, of the Corinthian Christians spoke in “tongues”, the congregation as a whole was spiritually immature. **“I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1 ESV)**.

Even if modern tongues were God-inspired, this type of thinking sets up a two-class system of Christianity, in violation of the principles expressed in the following scriptures:

“For you [who are born-again have been reborn from above-spiritually transformed, renewed, sanctified and] are all children of God [set apart for His purpose with full rights and privileges] through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ [into a spiritual union with the Christ, the Anointed] have clothed yourselves with Christ [that is, you have taken on His characteristics and values]. There is [now no distinction in regard to salvation] neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you [who believe] are all one in Christ Jesus [no one can claim a spiritual superiority].”—Galatians 3:26-28 Amplified Bible

“a renewal in which there is no [distinction between] Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, [nor between nations whether] barbarian or Scythian, [nor in status whether] slave or free, but Christ is all, and in all [so believers are equal in Christ, without distinction].”—Colossians 3:11 Amplified Bible

Even some unbelievers and pagans give the appearance of having been able to speak in tongues, and the Bible also warns about those with such supposed gifts, but who are not obedient to the Christian gospel. **“If I speak in the tongues ^a of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, ^b but do not have love, I gain nothing.” (1 corinthians 13:1-3 NIV)..**

So, when a modern Christian claims to be able to speak in miraculous tongues, it is not only wise to be skeptical, but also wise to question the legitimacy of such, in the light of what the Scriptures actually say.

DOESN'T MARK 16:17,18 FORETELL CHRISTIANS SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

Those who promote speaking in tongues in modern times often cite Mark 16:17,18 as “proof”. Verses 17 and 18 have Jesus promising: **“These signs will follow those who believe (implying ALL who believe): In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick; and they will recover” (NKJV). NLT says: “They will be able to handle snakes with safety”** However, these verse are part of a spurious addition to Mark’s gospel. The genuine Gospel of Mark ends at chapter 16 verse 8, and not 16:20.

How do we know Mark 16 ends at verse 8 and not 20? The footnote to **Mark 16:20** in the **NKJV** reads: **“Verses 9-20 are bracketed in the NU-Text as not original. They are lacking in the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other manuscripts of Mark contain them”**. The two best available Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, do not have anything after Mark 16:8. They have neither the usual 12 verse ending, or the less common shorter ending.

Neither does manuscript 304, the Sinaitic Old Syriac, some manuscripts of the Sahadic Coptic version, manuscripts of the Armenian translation, and some versions of the Georgian translation. It is significant that verses after **Mark 16:8** do not appear in any manuscript prior to the fifth century. This passage is included in a number of other, later manuscripts, but with critical marks, such as asterisks or obeli (marks to indicate that a passage is spurious, doubtful or corrupt), which tell us that the scribe knew of the questionable nature of these verses. The shorter ending is found in some less important manuscripts. In some other manuscripts, this shorter ending is combined with the longer ending. Codex W, an important early Greek manuscript, adds an entire paragraph between verses 14 and 15. All of this together is strong proof that **Mark 16:9-20** was not originally part of Mark’s Gospel. Bible scholar and translator Jerome, around 400 CE, said “Almost all the Greek codices (are) without this passage”.

Possibly, even a bigger problem for the end of Mark coming 12 verses after **Mark 16:8** than the manuscript evidence, is the variety of different endings. These make no sense if verses 9-20 were part of the original Gospel of Mark. If **Mark 16:9-20** was authentic, then there would not be all these various endings. The variety of endings is extremely strong proof that Mark originally ended at 16:8. These endings were obviously added later, so they could not be genuine.

Additional evidence against verses 9-20 is that the vocabulary, syntax and theological content are radically different from the genuine part of Mark’s gospel. The natural reading of these verses strongly implies that whoever wrote them originally wasn’t completely familiar with the entire book of Mark and the other gospels, and was using apocryphal (false) and extraneous sources. Verse 9 introduces Mary Magdalene as though she is being introduced to the reader for the first time, although she was mentioned just 8 verses previously, in 16:1, as well as in **Mark 15:40,47**. She is also mentioned in **Matthew 27:56,61**, which was probably written some years before Mark’s gospel, possibly 20 years prior to Mark, and in **Luke 8:1**, which was probably written a few years prior to Mark, mentions the “**seven demons**” Jesus drove out of her.

Mark 16:17,18 is similar to many apocryphal (false) writings that were circulating in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The NT records no Christian drinking deadly poison, much less recovering. While [1 Corinthians 12:29,30](#) notes that some early Christians spoke in tongues, and had other miraculous gifts, it impresses the point that not all did so. [1 Corinthians 12:31-13:3](#) emphasizes that these were not the greatest gifts, but love is. [1 Corinthians 13:8-13](#) stresses that these miraculous, but lesser, gifts would pass away once “completeness comes” (NIV), or “**perfection comes**” (NAB), apparently the complete NT. The point is that the spurious promise of [Mark 16:17,18](#) is contradicted by other scriptures, those which are actually inspired by God.

CONCLUSION

The following study Bible note about “**the seven churches**” ([Revelation 1:20](#)) of [Revelation 2 & 3](#) is quite helpful in this regard:

“The seven churches addressed in chaps. 2 and 3 were actual churches of John’s day. But they also represent types and conditions of churches in all generations. This idea is supported by the fact that only seven were selected out of all the many that existed and flourished in John’s time and by the statement at the close of each letter that the Spirit was speaking to the churches (vv. 7,11, etc.)”— Ryrie Study Bible note on [Revelation 2:1](#)

These letters to the [7](#) churches, which picture conditions in the church through all ages, mention nothing about Christians speaking in “tongues”. This is one of many New Testament evidences that speaking in “tongues” ‘ceased’ after the [1st](#) century, and is not something that should be done by modern Christians