

d Some Observations on the Phenomenon of Glossolalia and its Relevance Today

- (1) The phenomenon of speaking in tongues recorded in Acts 2, 10, and 19 represents the act of speaking in languages that are foreign to the speaker. In the nature of the case, this is not simply a spiritual gift but a supernatural gift -- beyond the natural or spiritual abilities of the speaker - - and it is imparted by the Holy Spirit.
- (2) In two of the three instances of foreign-language speaking in Acts, the speaking is closely connected with prophesying. In Acts 2:16-18 Peter says that this speaking is the effect of the predicted outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and that this outpouring results in all classes of human beings, regardless of age or gender -- sons and daughters, young men and old men, menservants and maidservants -- prophesying, seeing visions, and dreaming dreams (which are all modes of special revelation directly related to prediction of future events). And in Acts 19:6 Paul laid his hands on some disciples of John who had newly accepted Jesus as the Messiah who had accomplished redemption; and they spoke in foreign languages and prophesied. Both of these instances appear to say that the speakers prophesied in the foreign language that they were speaking.
- (3) The specific content of the act of speaking in foreign languages, as recorded in Acts 2:11, was "the mighty works of God;" and as recorded in Acts 10:46, "praise to God for His great mercy". No specific content is reported in Acts 19. We are not told which of the mighty acts of God were being extolled, or for what particular mercy they were praising God, but it is highly likely that the great work of God's gracious and merciful redemption through Christ was included. Perhaps some aspect of the spread of the gospel were predicted, or perhaps some features of the end time related to Christ's Second Coming.
- (4) The purpose of the act of speaking in foreign languages in Acts was twofold: apologetic and evangelistic. The Holy Spirit imparted this gift in order to provide supernatural evidence of the truth-claims made by the disciples of Christ, so that nonbelievers would receive and trust in Christ and His redemptive work, and believers would be convinced that God had extended His saving grace from Israel to all mankind, whether Jew, Samaritan, or Gentile.
- (5) The phenomenon of speaking in tongues recorded in I Corinthians 12-14, considered in itself without regard to its antecedent in Acts, could represent either the act of speaking in rational, meaningful languages that were foreign to the speaker but not foreign to all hearers, or the act of producing irrational, meaningless ecstatic utterances that were foreign to speakers and hearers alike. However, since the only antecedent we