

I SPEAK IN TONGUES

וַיִּמְלֹא כֹלָם רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ וַיַּחֲלֹו לְדַבֵּר בְּלִשְׁנוֹת אַחֲרוֹת כַּאֲשֶׁר נִתְּנָם הָרוּחַ לְסַפֵּר

I SPEAK IN TONGUES

The Lie That Changed Modern Christianity

A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

SHADAI PEREZ

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הִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ שֹׁמְעִים אֹתָם מְסַפְּרִים בְּלִשְׁנוֹתֵינוּ גְדוּלוֹת הָאֱלֹהִים

I Speak in Tongues: The Lie That Changed Modern Christianity

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לְסִפּוֹר

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Question



Is the gift of tongues from God? Is it what most people today understand it to be? Walk into churches across the world on any given weekend and you will hear ecstatic utterances—rapid, repetitive syllables that no one in the room understands—described as the biblical gift of tongues. For hundreds of millions of Christians, this practice is central to their spiritual identity. For others, it is a source of deep confusion, and for still others, a serious concern.

This study takes the question back to its source. What does the Bible actually describe when it speaks of tongues? Where did the gift first appear, what purpose did it serve, and what rules did the apostles give for its use? And then: how did the church's practice change across twenty centuries, and how did the modern phenomenon arise? The goal is not to attack anyone's sincerity. Sincere people can be sincerely mistaken—and the Bible itself commands us to test every spirit (1 John 4:1). That is what we will do.

Before the first argument is made, let one thing stand where it cannot be missed: this is not a book against the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God has not retired. His Spirit is alive and at work, and He still gives His gifts to the church today—healing in answer to prayer, preaching and teaching, faith, wisdom, helps, every gift of 1 Corinthians 12—distributed as He wills, for the profit of all. The chapters that follow are not an argument that the gifts are dead; they are an argument that a counterfeit is alive. Counterfeiters do not forge

d testimony that the genuine article is real, powerful, and precious. The quarrel of this book is never with the gift. It is with the forgery that stole its name.

One note on method before we begin. Rather than announcing a conclusion at the outset and defending it, this study walks the evidence in the order it comes to us: beginning where the story itself begins, at Babel, then walking through Pentecost, the book of Acts, and Paul's letters—pausing over the original words at the very moments they arise—then following twenty centuries of history—and only then sets the modern practice beside the biblical record, point by point, and lets the reader weigh the comparison. Conclusions will be drawn where the evidence draws them. And one commitment throughout: where the opposing view has a strong argument, this study will raise it first, state it at full strength, and answer it—nothing is gained by defeating a weak version of a serious position.

ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ Πνεῦμα
ἐδίδου αὐτοῖς ἀποφθέγγεσθαι

CHAPTER 2

Babel: Where Languages Began

To understand Pentecost, you have to start at Babel. Genesis 11 records humanity, unified in rebellion, building a tower "whose top is in the heavens" to make a name for themselves. God's response was to divide their one language into many:

GENESIS 11:7-9 (NKJV)

"Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth.

The confusion of languages was a judgment that scattered a rebellious race—but it also created the single greatest obstacle to the spread of any message: the language barrier. From Genesis 11 onward, the nations are divided by speech.

Hebrew captures what happened at Babel in a single word: *lashon* (לָשׁוֹן), which means both the physical tongue and a language—a people defined by its speech. Isaiah 66:18 looks forward to the day God gathers "all nations and tongues" to see His glory. Genesis 10, the Table of Nations, repeatedly divides humanity "according to their families, according to their languages (*lashon*)"—real, distinct human languages. When the New Testament write-

rs, steeped in this vocabulary, spoke of "tongues," their readers heard "languages."

Pentecost is the deliberate reversal of Babel. At Babel, one language became many and the people scattered in confusion. At Pentecost, many languages became one message and people from every nation gathered in understanding. At Babel, God confused speech to halt human pride. At Pentecost, God empowered speech to advance the gospel. The symmetry is not accidental—it is the theological frame Luke expects his readers to see. The gift of tongues, from its very first appearance, is about God overcoming the language barrier He once imposed, so that "the wonderful works of God" could reach every nation.

CHAPTER 3

Pentecost: The Gift Is Given (Acts 2)

3.1 Setting the scene

Pentecost (Greek for "fiftieth") was the Feast of Weeks, celebrated fifty days after Passover—one of the three pilgrimage festivals for which devout Jews traveled to Jerusalem from across the known world (Deuteronomy 16:16). Josephus describes crowds at these feasts numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Jerusalem at Pentecost was the most linguistically diverse gathering on earth: Jews and proselytes born and raised across three continents, each speaking the language of their homeland.

Now consider the problem facing the disciples. Jesus had just commanded them to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). But they were Galileans—provincial men who spoke Aramaic and, at most, marketplace Greek. The mission field standing in front of them spoke over a dozen native languages. The barrier erected at Babel stood squarely between the gospel and the world.

3.2 What happened

ACTS 2:4 (NKJV)

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

ACTS 2:7-8 (NKJV)

Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"

The crowd's astonishment turns on two facts: the speakers were recognizably Galilean (their accent and dress gave them away), and yet each hearer understood them in his birth language. Luke then itemizes the languages represented—a list that sweeps from Persia to Rome:

ACTS 2:9-11 (NKJV)

Parthians and Medes and Elamites; those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.

That is fifteen distinct regions, representing at least a dozen language groups: Parthian, Median, Elamite, Aramaic dialects of Mesopotamia, Cappadocian, the languages of Pontus and Roman Asia, Phrygian, Pamphylian, Coptic Egyptian, Cyrenaic Libyan dialects, Latin, Cretan Greek, and Arabic. These were real languages spoken by real nations, and the miracle was that unlearned Galileans spoke them fluently and intelligibly—no interpreter needed, no confusion, and the content was clear: "the wonderful works of God."

Critics of the real-language view lean on one detail in this scene: "Others mocking said, 'They are full of new wine'" (Acts 2:13). If the disciples were speaking recognizable languages, why did anyone think they were drunk? Doesn't the mockery suggest ecstatic, slurred behavior? Look at who says it. Luke has just spent five verses naming the amazed—the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and the rest, each hearing his own birth language. The mockers are "others" (heteroi)—a different group. Picture a Jerusalem local who speaks Aramaic and Greek, standing in a crowd where a dozen foreign languages sound at once: he understands none of them, and to him the scene is exuberant foreign noise—so he reaches for the cheapest available explanation. You cannot call a man drunk for speaking your language plainly; that is

precisely why no Parthian said it. The mockery is the reaction of the linguistically excluded, and Peter treats it with the seriousness it deserves: "these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day" (2:15)—and then preaches Joel and the resurrection in words the whole crowd understands. There is an irony here: being "drunk in the Spirit" is celebrated in modern revivalism as a badge of anointing. At Pentecost, drunkenness was the mockers' slander—and the apostles' first act was to refute it.

3.3 Stop and define it: the words *glōssa* and *dialektos*

The New Testament word translated "tongues" is the Greek *glōssa* (γλῶσσα). It has exactly two meanings in Greek literature and in the New Testament: (1) the physical organ, the tongue in the mouth, and (2) a language—a structured system of human speech. This is precisely how the word works in English ("the mother tongue"), in Spanish (*lengua* means both tongue and language), and in most languages. There is no third meaning of "ecstatic non-language utterance" anywhere in biblical Greek usage.

Luke reinforces this in Acts 2 with a second word: *dialektos* (διάλεκτος), from which we get "dialect." The crowd at Pentecost asks, "How is it that we hear, each in our own *dialektos* in which we were born?" (Acts 2:8). Luke uses *glōssa* and *dialektos* interchangeably in the same passage (compare 2:4 with 2:6, 8)—the tongues spoken were the native languages of the hearers. That equation is Luke's own inspired definition of the gift.

See the equation in the Greek text itself. Note especially Acts 2:8, where the King James translators themselves rendered *dialektos* as "tongue"—proof that they treated the two words as synonyms:

PASSAGE	GREEK TEXT	KJV	LITERAL RENDERING
Acts 2:4	ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις	began to speak with other tongues	began to speak in other languages (heterais glōssais)
Acts 2:6	ἤκουον εἰς ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλοῦντων αὐτῶν	every man heard them speak in his own language	each one heard them speaking in his own dialect (dialektō)

Acts	πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν ἕκαστος	how hear we every man	how do we hear, each in our
2:8	τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ᾧ ἐγεννήθημεν	in our own tongue, wherein we were born	own dialect (dialektō) in which we were born?

The tongues (glōssai) spoken in verse 4 are the dialects (dialektoi) heard in verses 6 and 8. Same event, two words, one meaning: languages people are born into.

3.4 The purpose and the result

The gift was not given for private ecstasy or as a badge of spirituality. It was a missionary tool with an immediate, measurable result: Peter preached, the hearers understood, and "that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41). Those three thousand pilgrims then returned home—to Parthia, Egypt, Rome, Arabia—carrying the gospel in their own languages. In one morning, God seeded the gospel across the entire map of Acts 2:9–11. Church history confirms it: within a generation, congregations existed in nearly every region on Luke's list.

Key observation: in its founding instance, the gift of tongues is defined by intelligibility. The miracle is not that no one understood—the miracle is that everyone did.

CHAPTER 4

Excursus: What Does "Prophecy" Mean?



Before going further we need to define a second term, because it appears alongside tongues repeatedly. In Scripture, to prophesy (Greek *prophēteuō*) does not primarily mean predicting the future. The word means to speak forth on God's behalf—to proclaim, preach, or declare His message. Foretelling is one form of it; forth-telling is the broader category.

Paul defines it functionally in 1 Corinthians 14:3: "he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men." That is a description of preaching. This matters because when Acts says new believers "spoke with tongues and prophesied," it means they proclaimed God's word intelligibly—people understood what they were saying. Prophecy by definition communicates; a "prophecy" no one understands is a contradiction in terms, which is exactly the point Paul will press in 1 Corinthians 14.

CHAPTER 5

The Other Instances of Tongues in Acts

Tongues appears in only three narratives in Acts—chapters 2, 10, and 19. Each marks a frontier moment when the gospel crossed into a new people group, and in each case the gift served as evidence that the same Spirit given at Pentecost had been given to the new group.

5.1 Acts 10—The Gentiles at Caesarea

ACTS 10:44–46 (NKJV)

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

The household of Cornelius—the first Gentile converts—received the Spirit and spoke in tongues. Note two things. First, the Jewish believers present recognized what was happening and understood the content: the Gentiles were "magnifying God." You cannot recognize that someone is magnifying God unless the words are intelligible. Second, Peter himself interprets the event as identical to Pentecost: "the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). Same Spirit, same gift, same kind of tongues—real

languages. The purpose was evidential: it proved to skeptical Jewish believers that God had accepted the Gentiles.

The standard objection to this passage runs like this: "There was no foreign audience in Cornelius's house—no Parthians to verify anything—so these tongues must have been devotional utterance, not languages." Three answers. First, the text says the hearers understood: they "heard them speak with tongues and magnify God" (10:46)—you cannot recognize that God is being magnified in speech you do not comprehend. Caesarea was the Roman administrative capital of Judea, a working city of Latin, Greek, and Aramaic; Peter's six companions were men of the multilingual coast. An audience able to recognize real languages was standing in the room—and did. Second, the sign's purpose required intelligibility: the event was evidence aimed at skeptical Jewish witnesses, and unintelligible sound is evidence of nothing to anyone. Third—and this ends the argument—the apostolic eyewitness himself classified the event: "the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning" (11:15); "God gave them the same gift as He gave us" (11:17). Peter, who was present at both, ruled the phenomena identical. To make Caesarea ecstatic utterance, one must claim Peter misidentified the gift he himself received at Pentecost. The same reasoning covers Ephesus, where tongues came paired with intelligible prophesying (19:6).

5.2 Acts 19—The Disciples at Ephesus

ACTS 19:6 (NKJV)

And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

Twelve disciples of John the Baptist in Ephesus—a crossroads port city teeming with languages—received the Spirit, spoke with tongues, and prophesied. As established above, prophesying means intelligible proclamation. The pairing of the two gifts in one breath tells us these men were speaking understandable, edifying content. Once again the gift marks a transitional moment: followers of the old covenant forerunner being folded into the new covenant church.

5.3 The pattern

- **Acts 2**—the gospel opens to the Jewish diaspora of every nation. Tongues: real languages, understood by native speakers.
- **Acts 10**—the gospel opens to the Gentiles. Tongues: understood as magnifying God; explicitly equated with Pentecost.
- **Acts 19**—disciples of John are brought into the church. Tongues paired with intelligible prophesying.

Three frontier crossings, one consistent gift. Nothing in Acts describes private ecstatic speech, and nothing describes utterances no one could understand. Acts is just as telling for what it does not say: thousands were converted and baptized throughout the book with no mention of tongues at all (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 8:36–38; 16:14–15, 33). The gift attended pivotal openings of the gospel to new groups—it was never presented as the universal or necessary evidence of receiving the Spirit.

πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν ἕκαστος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν
ᾧ ἐγεννήθημεν

CHAPTER 6

Corinth: The City and the Problem Church

6.1 The city

Corinth sat on the narrow isthmus connecting mainland Greece to the Peloponnese, controlling two harbors—one facing Italy, one facing Asia. Rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC as a Roman colony, it exploded into one of the wealthiest, most cosmopolitan cities in the empire: sailors, merchants, freedmen, and fortune-seekers from every shore of the Mediterranean. It was also a byword for vice. The old Greek verb *korinthiazesthai*—"to Corinthianize"—meant to live in drunken immorality. Above the city loomed the temple of Aphrodite, and throughout it operated the mystery cults of Dionysus, Cybele, and Apollo—religions famous for ecstatic frenzy, trance states, and unintelligible inspired speech.

This last point matters. Corinthian converts came out of a religious world where ecstatic utterance was already familiar. At the oracle of Delphi, fifty miles away, the priestess of Apollo (the Pythia) delivered messages in frenzied, unintelligible speech that priests then "interpreted." In the Dionysian rites, worshipers worked themselves into trances marked by shouting and ecstatic babbling, believing the god had possessed them. Pagan Greeks had a word for this inspired frenzy—it was considered proof of divine contact. When Paul opens the spiritual-gifts section by reminding the Corinthians,

r you were led" (1 Corinthians 12:2), he is pointing directly at that background: they had been swept up before in counterfeit inspiration, and some of it was evidently resurfacing inside the church.

6.2 The letter

1 Corinthians is a corrective letter from start to finish. Paul addresses factions (ch. 1–4), incest and lawsuits (ch. 5–6), marriage questions (ch. 7), idol food (ch. 8–10), disorder at the Lord's Supper (ch. 11), chaos in worship involving spiritual gifts (ch. 12–14), and denial of the resurrection (ch. 15). The tongues discussion is not a neutral teaching platform; it is damage control for a church whose worship services had become disorderly showcases of self-display. That context governs how every verse in chapters 12–14 should be read.

6.3 An honest question: why would real languages even be spoken in Corinth?

A thoughtful reader is already forming an objection: if tongues means real foreign languages, why would anyone stand up in a Greek-speaking assembly and speak Parthian or Coptic in the first place? Doesn't the very existence of the problem suggest the utterances were something other than languages? The question deserves a straight answer.

First, remember what Corinth was: a double-harbor boomtown of sailors, merchants, freedmen, and immigrants from every shore of the Mediterranean. A congregation drawn from that population contained native speakers of many languages, and—on the evidence of chapters 12–14—members genuinely gifted with languages they had not learned. The gift was real; the abuse was in its deployment. A message delivered in a language no hearer knew, without translation, edified no one—and Paul names the actual payoff of doing it anyway: the speaker "edifies himself" (14:4). Second, recall the religious economy of the region: at Delphi and in the Dionysian rites, unintelligible inspired speech was high-status—the audible proof of contact with the god. Converts formed in that world ("you know that you were

Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols," 12:2) had every cultural incentive to display the most spectacular-sounding gift in the most spectacular-sounding way—and Paul's opening insistence that utterances be tested by their content (12:3) hints that some of what was being voiced in the assembly may not have been the gift at all, but the old ecstasy in new dress.

Third, this reconstruction is an inference from the text, and it should be owned as one. But every reading of Corinth is a reconstruction, including the ecstatic one. The choice between inferences is made by what each costs. This one costs nothing: glossa keeps the only meaning it has anywhere in Greek literature, Luke's definition in Acts stands, and Paul's regulations read as exactly what they claim to be. The ecstatic reconstruction costs everything: a third meaning of glossa unknown to the language, a gift in Corinth different in kind from the gift in Acts, and an apostle regulating as language something he knew was not one. When two inferences compete, take the one that does not have to rewrite the dictionary.

CHAPTER 7

One Spirit, Many Gifts (1 Corinthians 12)



Paul begins by re-grounding the Corinthians in first principles. Spiritual gifts come from one Spirit, who distributes "to each one individually as He wills" (12:11). The gifts differ by design—apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues (12:28)—because the church is a body, and a body is not all one organ.

Then come the rhetorical questions of 12:29–30: "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?... Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?" In Greek, each question is framed to expect the answer no. This alone dismantles any teaching that tongues is the required evidence of the Spirit or a standard experience every believer must have. Paul says the opposite: no gift is universal, and tongues—note its position at the end of every list Paul gives—is one gift among many, distributed only to some, only as the Spirit wills.

Also decisive is the phrase "varieties (genē) of tongues" (12:10, 28)—literally "families" or "kinds" of languages. Languages come in families; ecstatic babble does not. The vocabulary continues to assume real languages.

ὁ γὰρ λαλῶν γλῶσση οὐκ ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ ἀλλὰ τῷ Θεῷ

CHAPTER 8

Love Above Every Gift (1 Corinthians 13)

Chapter 13 is not an interruption; it is the argument. Between the inventory of gifts (ch. 12) and the regulation of gifts (ch. 14), Paul plants the standard by which all gifts are measured: love. The chapter opens with the verse most often quoted in support of a heavenly prayer language:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1 (NKJV)

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

Does Paul claim to speak angelic languages? Look at the structure of the passage. Verse 2: "though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge... though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains." Verse 3: "though I give my body to be burned." Paul is stacking deliberate hyperboles—the most extreme case of each gift imaginable—to make one point: even the maximum of any gift, without love, is nothing. Did Paul understand all mysteries and all knowledge? No; he says elsewhere "we know in part" (13:9). Had he moved literal mountains? No. The "tongues of angels" belongs to the same rhetorical series: even if I spoke every language on earth and beyond, without love it is noise. Building a doctrine of angelic prayer language on this verse is like building a doctrine of mandatory martyrdom on verse 3.

Add to this that every time angels speak in Scripture—to Abraham, to Daniel, to Mary, to the shepherds—they speak the ordinary human language of their hearers, and are understood.

CHAPTER 9

Intelligibility and Order (1 Corinthians 14)

9.1 The governing principle: be understood

Chapter 14 is Paul's direct regulation of tongues in worship, and one theme dominates it from the first verse to the last: the church is edified only by what it can understand. Count the argument as it builds:

1 CORINTHIANS 14:9 (NKJV)

So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:19 (NKJV)

Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Five understood words outweigh ten thousand that are not understood—a ratio of 2,000 to 1. Paul reinforces the point with everyday illustrations: a flute or harp playing indistinct notes communicates nothing (14:7); a trumpet giving an uncertain sound prepares no one for battle (14:8); a foreign language, to the one who doesn't know it, makes speaker and hearer "foreigners" to each other (14:10–11). Verse 10 is telling: "There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without signific-

ance." Paul's frame of reference is the languages of the world—real languages, every one of which carries meaning.

9.2 The interpretation requirement

Because the gift is a real language, it can be translated—and Paul requires exactly that. "If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church" (14:27–28). The Greek word for interpret (*diermēneuō*) is the ordinary word for translating from one language to another—the same word used in Acts 9:36 for translating the name Tabitha into Greek ("Dorcas"). You can only translate a language. The interpretation requirement makes no sense for contentless ecstatic sound, but perfect sense for a foreign language spoken where no native hearer is present.

9.3 "I wish you all spoke with tongues" (14:5)—raising the counterargument first

1 CORINTHIANS 14:5 (NKJV)

I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

This is the verse the strongest defenders of the modern practice lead with, so here it is at full strength: if tongues is a missionary language gift given only to some, why would Paul wish it on everyone? Doesn't a universal wish fit a universal devotional practice better than a specialized sign gift? Three observations answer it.

First, the sentence has an exact biblical parallel. When Joshua urged Moses to silence two unauthorized prophets, Moses answered: "Oh, that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" (Numbers 11:29). No one reads Moses as teaching that all Israel would or should prophesy—it is the generous wish of a large-hearted leader. Paul's sentence is the same figure, and Paul cannot mean it as doctrine, because he has already answered the question two chapters earlier in

the same letter: "Do all speak with tongues?"—no (12:30). A rhetorical wish in chapter 14 cannot overturn the author's own stated distribution in chapter 12.

Second, watch how fast the wish is subordinated—inside its own sentence. "But even more that you prophesied... greater... unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification." Even at the moment of his warmest word about tongues, Paul keeps the interpretation law bolted on and ranks intelligible proclamation above it. The verse quoted for the modern practice contains, in its second half, the two regulations the modern practice ignores.

Third, on the real-language definition the wish makes perfect, natural sense. Paul is the church's greatest cross-cultural missionary writing from the middle of a lifetime spent crossing language borders. Of course he wishes every believer could carry the gospel into any language on earth—who would not wish the church a million Pentecosts? The wish is fully at home in the missionary reading. What it will not do is establish a private devotional practice the rest of the chapter regulates against.

9.4 A note on "unknown tongues"

In the King James Version, the phrase "unknown tongue" appears exactly six times—all in 1 Corinthians 14, and nowhere else in the entire Bible: 14:2, 14:4, 14:13, 14:14, 14:19, and 14:27. In every one of the six, the word *unknown* is in italics in the KJV itself, the translators' signal that the word is not in the Greek text. They supplied it to mean "a language unknown to the hearers." Later readers took "unknown tongue" to mean a mystical non-human language, an idea the italicized insertion was never meant to carry. Modern translations (NKJV, ESV, NASB) omit the word because it is not in the original.

Two further details sharpen the point. First, all six occurrences are the singular—"an unknown tongue," one man speaking one language. The plural "tongues" appears throughout the very same chapter (14:5, 6, 18, 22, 23, 39), and the translators never once attached "unknown" to it. Second, because the King James italics are easy to miss, here is each of the six verses set

beside the Greek text it translates, so the reader can verify with his own eyes that no word for "unknown" exists in any of them:

9.5 The six "unknown tongue" verses: KJV and Greek in parallel

VERSE	KJV ("UNKNOWN" ITALICIZED = SUPPLIED BY TRANSLATORS)	GREEK (TEXTUS RECEPTUS—THE KJV'S SOURCE TEXT)	LITERAL RENDERING
1 Cor 14:2	he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God	ὁ γὰρ λαλῶν γλώσση οὐκ ἀνθρώποις λαλεῖ, ἀλλὰ τῷ Θεῷ	for the one speaking in a language speaks not to men but to God
1 Cor 14:4	He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself	ὁ λαλῶν γλώσση ἑαυτὸν οἰκοδομεῖ	the one speaking in a language edifies himself
1 Cor 14:13	let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret	ὁ λαλῶν γλώσση προσευχέσθω ἵνα διερμηνεύῃ	let the one speaking in a language pray that he may translate
1 Cor 14:14	For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth	ἐὰν γὰρ προσεύχωμαι γλώσση, τὸ πνεῦμά μου προσεύχεται	for if I pray in a language, my spirit prays
1 Cor 14:19	than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue	ἢ μυρίους λόγους ἐν γλώσση	than ten thousand words in a language
1 Cor 14:27	If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three	εἴτε γλώσση τις λαλεῖ, κατὰ δύο ἢ τὸ πλεῖστον τρεῖς	if anyone speaks in a language, by two or at most three

In all six verses, the Greek behind "unknown tongue" is the single word *glōssē* (γλώσση)—"in a language." No adjective. No "unknown." Word by word, 1 Corinthians 14:2 opens: ὁ (the) γὰρ (for) λαλῶν (one-speaking) γλώσση (in-a-language) οὐκ (not) ἀνθρώποις (to-men) λαλεῖ (speaks) ἀλλὰ (but) τῷ Θεῷ (to-God). The entire modern edifice of the "unknown tongue" as a mystical non-human speech rests on a word the original does not contain and the King James translators themselves flagged as their own insertion.

9.6 What about 1 Corinthians 14:2?

1 CORINTHIANS 14:2 (NKJV)

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

This is the second pillar verse for the modern private-prayer-language view, so read it in its setting. Paul is describing what is actually happening in Corinth, not endorsing it: a man stands up in a Greek-speaking assembly and speaks in a language no one present knows. Who understands him? "No one"—no one, that is, except God, who understands all languages. He is not communicating; whatever mysteries he utters stay locked inside the sound. That is precisely Paul's complaint, as the following verses show: the prophesier edifies the church, but the uninterpreted tongue-speaker edifies only himself (14:4)—and self-edification while the church gains nothing is exactly what love does not do (13:5, "love does not seek its own"). Verse 4 is a rebuke of misuse, not a recommendation of a devotional technique. Paul's remedy is immediate: pray that you may interpret (14:13), and if no interpreter is present, keep silent (14:28).

9.7 A sign for unbelievers—the Isaiah key

In 14:21–22 Paul does something interpreters often skip: he defines the purpose of tongues by quoting the Old Testament.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:21–22 (NKJV)

In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; and yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers...

The quotation is Isaiah 28:11, where God warns Judah that because they refused His clear word, He would "speak" to them through the foreign language of Assyrian invaders—real foreign speech as a sign of judgment and a call to attention. Paul applies the pattern: tongues are a sign directed at unbelievers, exactly as at Pentecost, where the miracle of foreign languages arr-

ested a crowd of unbelieving pilgrims and opened the door for Peter's sermon. Tongues were never designed as a devotional exercise for believers among believers; used that way in a gathered church, Paul says, they accomplish the opposite of a sign—visitors will conclude "you are out of your mind" (14:23). And here confront the tension commentators famously raise: verse 22 calls tongues a sign for unbelievers, yet verse 23 says unbelievers who hear them will think the church is insane. Is Paul contradicting himself within two sentences? No—the tension is his argument. In the Isaiah pattern, tongues function as a sign only when they are real languages actually reaching real hearers, as at Pentecost, where foreign speech arrested foreign-born hearers and opened the way for preaching. Strip the conditions away—no foreign hearers, no interpretation, everyone speaking at once—and the same gift stops functioning as a sign at all and produces only the verdict of madness. Verses 23–25 do not contradict verse 22; they demonstrate what happens when the sign is deployed outside its design. Prophecy converts the visitor for exactly the reason tongues-in-chaos repels him: he understands it, is convicted, and falls on his face declaring "God is truly among you" (14:25).

9.8 The rules of order

Paul closes with concrete, enforceable regulations—and virtually every one of them is violated in modern mass tongues-speaking:

- **Maximum of two or three** tongue-speakers in any service (14:27).
- **One at a time** —"each in turn," never simultaneously (14:27).
- **Interpretation is mandatory** —"let one interpret" (14:27).
- **No interpreter, no speaking** —"let him keep silent in church" (14:28).
- **The speaker is in control** —"the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (14:32). Genuine gifts do not override the will; uncontrollable compulsion is foreign to the Spirit's work.

And then the summary principle that stands over the whole chapter, and over this entire study:

1 CORINTHIANS 14:33, 40 (NKJV)

For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints... Let all things be done decently and in order.

CHAPTER 10

The Biblical Portrait: What the Evidence Yields

Before turning to history, gather up what the biblical record itself has established. Taken in order—Babel, Pentecost, Caesarea, Ephesus, and Paul's regulations to Corinth—the evidence yields one consistent portrait. In Scripture, the gift of tongues is marked by:

- **Real language.** Glōssa and dialektos used interchangeably (Acts 2:4–8); "families of languages" (1 Cor 12:10); "so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance" (14:10).
- **Public verification.** Native speakers of at least a dozen languages confirmed in real time what was spoken (Acts 2:8–11); hearers recognized the content—"the wonderful works of God," "magnifying God" (Acts 2:11; 10:46).
- **Intelligibility and interpretation.** "Words easy to understand" (14:9); five understood words above ten thousand not understood (14:19); translation mandatory, silence without it (14:27–28).
- **A missionary, outward purpose.** A sign to unbelievers (14:22), given at the frontier crossings of the gospel (Acts 2, 10, 19), fulfilling "you shall be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8).
- **Order and self-control.** Two or three, in turn, spirits subject to the prophets, God not the author of confusion, all things decently and in

order (14:27–33, 40).

- **Distribution to some, not all.** "Do all speak with tongues?"—expected answer, no (12:30); never the required evidence of the Spirit.
- **Unsought arrival.** In every instance, given instantly and unsought—never begged for, incubated, taught, or coached (Acts 2, 10, 19).

Taken together: in Scripture, the gift of tongues is the supernatural ability to speak real human languages the speaker never learned, given for the purpose of spreading the gospel and confirming God's work across language barriers. The modern practice of unintelligible ecstatic utterance is a different phenomenon—one with closer parallels in pagan ecstatic religion than in the book of Acts—and it entered Christianity through a specific, traceable history. The remainder of this study documents that history, examines the modern practice, and sets the two side by side, point by point.

CHAPTER 11

Tongues in Church History

11.1 The post-apostolic silence

If ecstatic tongues had been a normal, ongoing feature of Christian devotion, the writings of the early church would show it. They do not. The Didache, Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin Martyr—the earliest Christian literature after the apostles is essentially silent on tongues as a continuing practice. One significant exception should be faced before a critic raises it: Irenaeus of Lyons (c. AD 180) wrote that "we have heard of many brethren in the church... who through the Spirit speak all kinds of languages." Taken at full face value, the report shows two things. It is secondhand—something "heard of," not witnessed—and, more importantly, it describes languages: Irenaeus, who knew the book of Acts intimately, reports the phenomenon in the vocabulary of real language, not ecstatic utterance. If genuine instances of the true gift persisted into the second century at the gospel's frontiers, nothing in this study is troubled—the claim here has never been that God lost an ability, but that the gift faded with the apostolic frontier, and that what arose in 1901 is not it. Irenaeus, read carefully, is a witness for the real-language definition, not against it. By the fourth and fifth centuries, the church's greatest expositors state plainly that the gift had ceased in their day. John Chrysostom, commenting on 1 Corinthians 12, admits the passage is obscure to him precisely "by our ignorance of the facts referred

to," because such things "used to occur but now no longer take place." Augustine wrote that the tongues of Pentecost were "a sign adapted to the time"—given so that the gospel's future reach to all nations would be betokened—and that the sign had passed away once its purpose was served. Whatever one concludes about the possibility of the gift's return, the historical record is clear: for well over a millennium, tongues was not a feature of mainstream Christian experience.

11.2 The exceptions prove the rule

The scattered movements that did claim ecstatic utterance were, tellingly, groups the church judged to be in error. Montanism (2nd century) featured prophets speaking in ecstatic frenzy, claiming the Spirit spoke through them involuntarily—the church rejected the movement, in part precisely because its uncontrollable ecstasy contradicted 1 Corinthians 14:32. Later episodes—the Camisard prophets of France (1700s), the Shakers, the followers of Edward Irving in 1830s London (whose tongues movement collapsed amid failed prophecies), and the early Latter-day Saints—form a lineage of fringe ecstatic movements, not a continuation of Acts.

11.3 The modern movement is born: 1901–1906

Modern tongues-speaking has a precise birthplace. In 1900, healing evangelist Charles Fox Parham opened Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, and assigned his students to study the book of Acts for the evidence of Spirit baptism. On January 1, 1901, student Agnes Ozman received the laying on of hands and began to utter what the group believed was Chinese. Parham taught that these tongues were xenoglossy—real foreign languages given for missionary work—and Pentecostal missionaries went abroad expecting to preach in supernaturally-given languages. The attempt failed publicly and painfully: missionaries arrived in India, China, and Japan and discovered the locals could not understand a word. The movement's response was pivotal—rather than concluding the utterances were not the biblical gift, it quietly redefined tongues as a "heavenly language" not meant to be understood. The

doctrine of the private prayer language was, in a real sense, born from a failed field test.

In 1906, Parham's student William J. Seymour carried the teaching to Los Angeles, where the Azusa Street Revival ran for years of round-the-clock meetings marked by ecstatic tongues, shaking, and falling. Azusa Street became the launchpad of global Pentecostalism. The Charismatic renewal carried the practice into mainline denominations beginning around 1960 (Episcopal priest Dennis Bennett's public announcement is the conventional marker), and the "Third Wave" of the 1980s brought it into evangelicalism at large. Today the practice spans hundreds of millions of Christians—all downstream of Topeka, 1901. It is a striking fact of history that the modern phenomenon is not a continuation of anything; it is a re-invention, eighteen centuries removed from Pentecost, whose own founding definition (real missionary languages) it had to abandon within its first decade.

ἐὰν γὰρ προσεύχωμαι γλώσση τὸ πνεῦμά μου
προσεύχεται

CHAPTER 12

What Linguistics Found

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The claims of modern glossolalia have been studied by linguists for decades, most extensively by William Samarin of the University of Toronto, who spent years recording and analyzing tongue-speech across Pentecostal and Charismatic communities in multiple countries. His conclusion, published in 1972, was that glossolalia has the surface rhythm and melody of speech but lacks every structural property of language: no stable vocabulary, no grammar, no relationship between sound and meaning. Speakers overwhelmingly produce syllables drawn from their own native language's sound inventory—English speakers babble English-flavored sounds. Samarin classified it as a learned, human vocal performance rather than a language, and noted that it appears in many religions outside Christianity.

That last point matters. Comparable ecstatic vocalization is documented among Haitian Vodou practitioners, in African traditional religions, among Tibetan monks, in the ancient Delphic and Dionysian cults, and in Hindu ecstatic practice. Whatever modern glossolalia is, it is not unique to Christianity and not evidence, by itself, of the Holy Spirit—the identical phenomenon occurs where the Holy Spirit is not even claimed. Contrast this with Acts 2, where the test was empirical and public: native speakers of a dozen languages verified in real time that unlearned Galileans were speaking their languages. Biblical tongues was falsifiable and verified; modern glossolalia, tested, has never once been verified as language.

CHAPTER 13

Ecstatic Experience: Eastern Practice and Modern Revivalism

13.1 Kundalini and the anatomy of ecstasy

In Hindu tradition, kundalini is conceived as a serpent-like energy coiled at the base of the spine, awakened through intense yogic and meditative practice. Practitioners of kundalini awakening report—and teachers of the tradition describe—a recognizable cluster of manifestations: involuntary shaking and jerking, falling to the ground, waves of heat, uncontrollable laughter or weeping, trance states, and spontaneous ecstatic vocalizations. In guru traditions, this state can be transmitted by touch (shaktipat), often to the forehead, causing the recipient to collapse or convulse. The experience is interpreted as possession or infusion by divine energy.

Set that description beside a modern "revival" service—hands laid on foreheads, recipients collapsing ("slain in the spirit"), violent shaking, uncontrollable laughter, trance, ecstatic utterance—and the overlap is impossible to miss. The phenomena are, point for point, the same. That does not prove the source is the same in every case; but it demolishes the argument that these manifestations are self-evidently the Holy Spirit. Identical manifestations arise in traditions that explicitly attribute them to other spirits. Experience cannot authenticate itself—which is why Scripture never asks us

to judge by manifestation, but by the Word: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

13.2 How far back does the falling go? Tracing the practice

Millions first saw this practice through Benny Hinn's crusades of the 1980s and 90s—hands laid on foreheads, rows of people collapsing and shaking. But Hinn did not originate it, and he has never claimed to. He is the self-declared heir of healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman (1907–1976), whose services he attended as a young man in 1973 and about whom he later wrote a devoted book. It was Kuhlman, in the 1940s through the 1970s, who perfected the modern format: she would point at or touch people and they would fall backward—and, significantly, the falling was no longer a spontaneous crowd phenomenon but was produced on cue, controlled by the minister conducting the meeting. In the 1960s and 70s, Kenneth Hagin Sr. and Charles and Frances Hunter adopted the practice into their own ministries.

And where did Kuhlman get it? By Hinn's own account, she first witnessed people "slain in the Spirit" at the meetings of healing evangelist Charles S. Price—who had himself received it at the meetings of Aimee Semple McPherson, the celebrity revivalist of the 1920s who popularized "falling under the power." Behind McPherson stands Maria Woodworth-Etter (1844–1924), the "trance evangelist" of the 1880s Holiness movement—the first preacher to make trance and falling a regular platform feature. She spoke of people being "slain of the Lord," would herself freeze in trances mid-service with hands raised for an hour, and was so effective at inducing the state in crowds that newspapers repeatedly accused her of mass hypnotism. The chain of custody is documented at every link: Woodworth-Etter → McPherson → Price → Kuhlman → Hinn. The practice seen on Christian television has a genealogy—and it begins not at Pentecost but on a revival platform in the 1880s.

Push further back and the trail continues—but never toward the apostles. At the Cane Ridge camp meeting in Kentucky (1801), eyewitness Barton Stone described thousands falling "as men slain in battle," lying breathless

for hours, alongside convulsive jerking ("the jerks"), barking, running, and fits of laughter. In the 1730s and 40s, people collapsed at the meetings of Wesley and Whitefield—and critics already suspected technique, accusing Wesley of using powder up his sleeves to make hearers pass out. In Paris in 1731, at the tomb of a Jansenist deacon in the Saint-Médard cemetery, Catholic pilgrims fell into violent convulsive fits accompanied by claimed miraculous healings—the famous *convulsionnaires*—until the crown closed the cemetery in 1732. In the fourteenth through seventeenth centuries, waves of "dancing mania" swept Europe—beginning at Aachen in 1374—in which crowds danced in frenzy until they collapsed, a phenomenon everyone at the time interpreted religiously. And in the 1770s–80s, the Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer produced the identical collapse in Paris salons with waves of his hands—"animal magnetism," the ancestor of stage hypnosis—with no Holy Spirit claimed by anyone. Mesmer is the control experiment of this entire history: the same falling, the same convulsions, the same euphoria, produced by expectation, authority, and suggestion, in an explicitly secular setting.

The oldest documented case of manifestation-frenzy in religion is in the Bible itself—and it is on the wrong side of the altar. On Mount Carmel, the prophets of Baal "leaped about the altar," "cried aloud," and "cut themselves... until the blood gushed out," prophesying in frenzy "until the time of the evening sacrifice" (1 Kings 18:26–29). Ecstatic, self-abandoning, physically violent worship was the signature of Baal's prophets. Elijah's God answered with fire—and later spoke to Elijah not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in "a still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11–12). From Carmel to Delphi to the dancing manias to the revival platform, the frenzy has a continuous pedigree. It is just not a biblical one.

13.3 The same phenomena in the world's religions

If falling, shaking, and trance were the fingerprint of the Holy Spirit, they should appear only where the Holy Spirit is claimed. Instead, they appear virtually everywhere the technique appears—under mutually exclusive gods. Anthropologists treat possession trance as a single, well-documented, cross-

cultural human phenomenon; religious practices built on induced trance are found on every inhabited continent:

- **Haitian Vodou.** Worshipers are "mounted" by the lwa (spirits) in ceremonies driven by repetitive drumming, song, and dance designed to "heat things up" until a dissociative state takes hold—convulsive onset, collapse, altered voice and behavior, and often amnesia afterward. Possession is the desired climax of the service.
- **Zar cults of Ethiopia and North Africa.** Ceremonies of drumming and dance in which participants—mostly women—enter possession trance, shaking and falling as the zar spirit takes them.
- **Shamanism, worldwide.** From Siberia to the Americas, the shaman's defining skill is entering trance and possession states—induced by rhythmic drumming, chanting, and expectation—marked by convulsion, collapse, and ecstatic speech.
- **Sufi dhikr.** Rhythmic chanting, swaying, and whirling carried to the point of ecstatic trance and, at times, collapse.
- **Hindu shaktipat.** As detailed above (§13.1)—the guru's touch to the forehead transmits "energy," and the recipient falls, shakes, laughs, or weeps. Of all the world's practices, this one is visually indistinguishable from the crusade-platform format.
- **Afro-Brazilian Candomblé and Umbanda; Balinese temple trance.** Ceremonial possession with convulsive onset and collapse, deliberately induced by music, repetition, and communal expectation.

Set the ingredients side by side and the recipe is the same in every tradition: rhythm and repetition, heightened expectation, a trusted authority figure, a charged crowd, and often a touch. Where those ingredients are assembled, human beings fall, shake, weep, and feel transported—whether the name invoked is the lwa, the zar, kundalini, or the Holy Spirit. A phenomenon that appears under every god cannot be evidence for any god. The Holy Spirit's genuine work is identified in Scripture by truth, transformation, and the fruit of self-control—never by voltage.

13.4 Case study: the Lakeland Revival (2008)

The Lakeland Revival in Florida illustrates where manifestation-driven religion leads. Beginning in April 2008, Canadian evangelist Todd Bentley led nightly meetings that drew up to ten thousand attendees and millions more by satellite broadcast, centered on faith healing, angel encounters, and dramatic manifestations—crowds falling, shaking, and erupting in ecstatic utterance, all attributed to the Holy Spirit. Bentley's own story, by his account, was one of a hard past—drug and alcohol addiction and a criminal conviction in his youth—before conversion. (A widely repeated claim holds that Bentley practiced kundalini yoga before his conversion; that claim is not supported by his documented biography. What is true is that numerous Christian observers at the time publicly compared the Lakeland manifestations, point by point, to kundalini-awakening phenomena—the comparison came from the critics, not from Bentley's own history. The parallel stands on the phenomena themselves.)

Test Lakeland against 1 Corinthians 14 and the contrast with Scripture is total. Order? The meetings were engineered chaos. Intelligibility? The utterances edified no one and were never interpreted. Self-control? Participants described being overtaken, unable to stop—the precise opposite of "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Verification? ABC's *Nightline* investigated the healing claims and reported it could not independently verify a single one. Fruit? Within months, amid revelations of an inappropriate relationship, Bentley separated from his wife and resigned from his ministry, and the revival collapsed—leaving even sympathetic Charismatic leaders publishing post-mortems on what had gone wrong. "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:20).

Lakeland was not an anomaly. It stood in a direct line from the Toronto Blessing (1994) and the Brownsville Revival (1995)—the same manifestations, the same theology of impartation, the same indifference to Paul's regulations. Each wave normalizes the next. This is why the question of tongues is not academic: an entire stream of Christianity has been trained to identify the Holy Spirit by sensations and manifestations that Scripture never ass-

ociates with Him, and that pagan ecstatic religion has always associated with its own gods.

13.5 If this has happened to you

Before this study turns to the remaining arguments, one thing needs to be said directly, because there is a real chance it describes you or someone you love. Perhaps you went forward at a service. Hands were laid on you. You fell—you were not pushed, or not exactly—and you felt heat, or electricity, or a wave of peace, or you wept in a way you never had before. And you concluded, reasonably, that you had encountered God. Let this be said plainly: what you felt was real. Your body really fell. The warmth, the release, the euphoria, the tears—none of it was fake, and you were not lying. You went seeking God with a sincere heart, and no part of this study questions that sincerity for a moment.

But here is the hard and necessary truth: the reality of an experience does not establish its source. Everything you felt is documented, in detail, in settings where no one even claims the Holy Spirit—under the drums of a Vodou ceremony, under a guru's thumb pressed to the forehead, under a stage hypnotist's suggestion, in a Paris salon under Mesmer's hands two hundred and fifty years ago. Sincere seekers in every one of those settings felt what you felt and drew the same conclusion about their own gods. The experience is human—wonderfully, measurably human: expectation, trust, touch, rhythm, and release, produced by the same nervous system in every culture. That is why it cannot carry the weight placed on it. Unfortunately, what you felt—however real, however moving—was not the Holy Spirit. It was not, because the Spirit of God has told us how He works, and it is not by overwhelming bodies into collapse: "God is not the author of confusion but of peace" (1 Cor 14:33); "the fruit of the Spirit is... self-control" (Gal 5:22–23); the Lord was not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in the still small voice (1 Kings 19:11–12).

And understand what this does not mean. It does not mean God was far from you that night—He was as near as He has ever been, drawing you, as He is drawing you now through His word. It does not mean you have lost

something real—nothing real about God is lost by letting go of what was never Him. What He actually offers is better than a jolt on a platform: the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2), the peace that guards heart and mind (Philippians 4:7), the Spirit Himself dwelling in you through faith—identified not by sensations but by truth, by Christ exalted, and by a changed life (John 16:13–14; Gal 5:22–23). The God who did not shout at Elijah is not less present for being quiet. Test what you felt, as He invites you to—and then trade it, without grief, for what He actually promised.

θέλω δὲ πάντε λόγους διὰ τοῦ νοός μου λαλῆσαι ἢ
μυρίους λόγους ἐν γλώσση

CHAPTER 14

Other Commonly Cited Passages

14.1 "Groanings which cannot be uttered" (Romans 8:26)

"The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." This verse is sometimes offered as support for a private prayer language, but the groanings are the Spirit's, not ours, and they are unutterable—not spoken at all, by anyone. A verse about the Spirit's silent intercession cannot describe audible human speech. It teaches the opposite of vocalized ecstatic prayer.

14.2 "New tongues" (Mark 16:17)

"They will speak with new tongues." New (*kainos*) means new to the speaker—languages they had not previously known—which is exactly what Acts 2 records as the fulfillment. The verse says nothing about non-human languages.

For completeness, one textual fact should be on the table before a scholar puts it there: the two earliest Greek manuscripts of Mark end at 16:8, and students of the text across all camps acknowledge that verses 9–20 stand on disputed manuscript ground. That is a problem for the modern position, not for this study—one of its proof texts is textually uncertain—but the verse has been answered here on its merits anyway: taken fully as Scripture, "new

tongues" means languages new to the speakers, fulfilled to the letter in Acts 2.

14.3 Praying "in the spirit" (1 Corinthians 14:14-15)

"If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful." Paul is again describing the problem—praying in a language whose content bypasses the mind—and his stated resolution follows immediately: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding." Both, together, always. Paul refuses to separate spirit from understanding; the modern practice makes that separation its defining feature.

The opposing reading, at its strongest, runs like this—and this verse is the modern position's best exegetical ground: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding" can be read as Paul affirming two parallel modes of prayer—keeping tongue-prayer and adding understood prayer alongside it. Three answers. First, the grammar of "also" joins the understanding to the same praying, and the verse immediately following supplies the test: if you bless with the spirit, how will the hearer "say 'Amen'... since he does not understand what you say?" (14:16)—a test that only prayer with understanding can pass, which is why Paul calls the alternative "unfruitful" in the verse before. A reading in which Paul licenses fruitless prayer as a permanent second mode has Paul solving his own stated problem by keeping it. Second, the trajectory of the chapter runs one direction only: five words with understanding above ten thousand without (14:19), "in understanding be mature" (14:20). Third—and decisively—grant the two-mode reading entirely, for argument's sake: the spirit-mode remains under the chapter's law, "let him pray that he may interpret" (14:13), "if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent" (14:28). Even on its friendliest reading, the verse cannot yield an unregulated practice of unintelligible prayer. The strongest verse in the case still comes bolted to the rules the practice breaks.

14.4 "Tongues will cease" (1 Corinthians 13:8)

"Whether there are tongues, they will cease." Paul says the sign-gifts are temporary scaffolding while love is permanent. Christians debate exactly when

tongues ceased or whether God may still grant languages for mission today—this study does not need to settle that question. What Scripture does settle is what the gift is when genuine: a real language, intelligible, orderly, and aimed at spreading the gospel. Anything claiming the name must match the description.

CHAPTER 15

The Private Prayer Language Examined

The most common retreat position in this discussion runs like this: "Maybe tongues in church requires interpretation—but I pray in the Spirit privately, in an angelic language, just between me and God." This claim needs examining on its own, because Scripture speaks to it directly, and at every point it speaks against it.

15.1 Jesus' only teaching on private prayer forbids it

There is exactly one place where Jesus teaches how to pray when you are alone—Matthew 6—and He opens it with a prohibition: "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words" (Matthew 6:7). The Greek verb is *battaloo*—to babble, to stammer, to pile up repetitive syllables. Jesus identifies babbling prayer as the signature of **pagan** devotion—the ecstatic repetitions of the priests of Baal on Carmel (1 Kings 18:26–29) and of the Greek mystery cults. And what does He give as the alternative? "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name..."—plain, intelligible, ordered words addressed from the mind to God. The one time Jesus taught private prayer, He ruled out unintelligible repetition by name and modeled the opposite.

15.2 "Praying in the Spirit" cannot mean tongues

The phrase itself comes from two commands:

EPHESIANS 6:18 (NKJV)

...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

JUDE 20 (NKJV)

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit...

Both verses command **all** believers to pray in the Spirit—Ephesians adds "always" and "with all prayer." But Paul has already established that not all believers speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30—a question expecting the answer no). If praying in the Spirit meant praying in tongues, Scripture would be commanding every believer to do continually what it elsewhere says only some can do at all. The equation collapses on its own arithmetic. Praying in the Spirit means what the words say: praying under the Spirit's prompting, guidance, and power—with the understanding fully engaged, exactly as Paul resolves in 1 Corinthians 14:15: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding." Both together, never one without the other. The context of Ephesians 6:18 points the same way: watchfulness, perseverance, intercession "for all the saints"—alert, contentful prayer about real people and needs, not a bypass of the mind.

The pattern-setter is Jesus Himself. "Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...'" (Luke 10:21)—the only person in Scripture explicitly described as praying in a Spirit-filled state of rejoicing, and the prayer is plain speech. In Gethsemane, at the point of maximum spiritual intensity in human history, He prayed in ordinary, recorded, intelligible words (Matthew 26:39).

15.3 Every recorded prayer in Scripture is intelligible

The Bible is a book saturated with prayer—Abraham, Moses, Hannah, David, Solomon, Elijah, Hezekiah, Daniel, Jonah, Mary, Paul, and the whole Spirit-filled church of Acts 4:24–31, praying together immediately after Pentecost with the building shaking under the Spirit's power. Every single recorded prayer, from Genesis to Revelation, is in intelligible language. If a heavenly prayer tongue were the higher form of devotion, it is inexplicable that no prophet, no apostle, and no Spirit-filled congregation anywhere in Scripture is ever shown practicing it. Paul even builds intelligibility into the definition of prayer: if you bless God in a tongue, "how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?" (1 Corinthians 14:16). Biblical prayer is Amen-able by design—it carries content that another mind can affirm.

15.4 A "gift for myself" contradicts the definition of a gift

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7 (NKJV)

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

Every spiritual gift, by Paul's definition, is other-directed—given "for the profit of all," for "the edifying of the body" (Ephesians 4:12), so that believers "minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). A gift exercised solely on oneself, in private, with no beneficiary but the practitioner, contradicts the stated purpose of every gift. And tongues specifically has a declared audience: "tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers" (14:22). A private devotional practice has no unbeliever present—it structurally cannot accomplish the one purpose Scripture assigns to the gift. The practice survives only by detaching the gift from its own definition.

15.5 The man who heard heaven's language was forbidden to speak it

2 CORINTHIANS 12:4 (NKJV)

...how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Paul is the one person in Scripture who reports actually hearing the speech of Paradise—and his testimony is that it was inexpressible and unlawful for a man to utter. The single biblical data point on heavenly language runs exactly opposite to the modern claim: what belongs to heaven was not given to Paul to reproduce on earth. It strains belief that the same apostle who was forbidden to utter what he heard in Paradise was simultaneously practicing an angelic language in his daily devotions and prescribing it to others—and never once said so in thirteen letters.

15.6 The biblical gift was never taught, coached, or learned

In every instance in Acts, the gift arrives unsought, instantly, and fully formed—the disciples were not expecting it (Acts 2), Cornelius' household had not asked for it (Acts 10), the Ephesian twelve did not know it existed (Acts 19). No one was instructed in technique. Contrast the modern practice, which is openly coached: seekers are told to relax the jaw, begin repeating syllables, "prime the pump," and let the sounds flow—instruction manuals and tarrying meetings exist for exactly this purpose. This is also the honest explanation for why the practice spreads so readily and why linguists find it learnable by anyone in any religion (see §12): it is an acquired human vocal behavior. A supernatural gift that requires human coaching to produce is not the event described in Acts, where the whole point was that God gave abilities no human process could supply.

The coaching is not a caricature; it is printed curriculum. One widely circulated charismatic children's booklet—an eight-page coloring book titled "I've Been Filled with the Holy Spirit"—shows a little boy with syllables printed inside his chest, "bali-o-dama-tala-sita-nomo" rising from his mouth,

and a question mark drawn inside his brain: the doctrine of the bypassed mind, taught to kindergartners in crayon. For adults, Charles Hunter's seminars instructed seekers: "When you pray with your spirit, you do not think of the sounds of the language... make the sounds rapidly so you won't try to think," adding, "you don't even have to think in order to pray in the spirit." Set that beside Acts 2, where the Spirit Himself "gave them utterance" to unlearned men who had asked for nothing, and the distance is plain. The testimony of those who went furthest in is just as sobering. George E. Gardiner, a former Pentecostal tongues-speaker turned pastor, warned that the ecstasy "like drug addiction, requires larger and larger doses to satisfy"—leaving behind, in his words, spectators, fakers, and casualties. Wayne Robinson, once editor-in-chief for the Oral Roberts association, concluded that for a great many, tongues "has been an excuse to withdraw from confronting the realities of a suffering and divided world."

Summary: the private prayer language cannot cite a single verse that describes it, contradicts Jesus' explicit teaching on private prayer, fails the arithmetic of Ephesians 6:18 against 1 Corinthians 12:30, has no example anywhere in Scripture, inverts the purpose of spiritual gifts, and runs opposite to Paul's own testimony about heavenly speech. It is not a biblical practice defended by texts; it is an experience in search of texts.

εἴτε γλῶσση τις λαλεῖ κατὰ δύο ἢ τὸ πλεῖστον τρεῖς καὶ
εἷς διερμηνεύτω

CHAPTER 16

Answering the Arguments: What People Say in Religious Circles



The claims examined so far do not circulate as abstract theology. They come packaged in a familiar, reasonable-sounding form—often from teachers describing themselves as the balanced middle ("charismatic with a seat belt"): tongues comes in three types (proof tongues, prophetic tongues, private tongues); the private prayer language "would take a pair of scissors to cut out of the Bible"; and personal testimony seals the case. This section takes the twelve most common claims, states each fairly as it is actually taught, and answers it from Scripture. Because these claims travel by sermon, podcast, and testimony, you may never have heard the particular broadcast a given claim comes from—so each one is introduced with enough context to stand on its own. Sooner or later, you will meet every one of them.

Claim 1: "The word tongue just means language"

What they say: The Greek word behind "tongues" simply means language, like Spanish or French—a point offered to take the strangeness off the topic.

The biblical answer: Agreed—completely. And the concession is fatal to everything built on top of it. Glossa means language: a structured system of speech with vocabulary, grammar, and meaning; Luke confirms it by usi-

ng glossa and dialektos interchangeably in Acts 2:4–8. But a "private prayer language" of syllables the speaker himself does not understand—with no vocabulary, no grammar, and no meaning—is not a language by their own definition. An argument cannot open by defining tongues as language and close by defending non-language. The first thirty seconds refutes the rest.

Claim 2: "There are three types of tongues: proof, prophetic, and private"

What they say: One Greek word, glossa, means three different things in the New Testament.

The biblical answer: Scripture nowhere divides tongues into types. The same word is used by the same authors for the same gift, and Luke defines it in its founding instance as real human languages verified in real time by native speakers (Acts 2:6–11). Peter explicitly equates later occurrences with Pentecost: "the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning" (Acts 11:15). Look at what the three categories actually do. "Proof tongues" is the biblical gift. "Prophetic tongues"—a message plus interpretation—is also the biblical gift, since interpretation (diemeneuo) is the ordinary Greek word for translating a real language (Acts 9:36, where Tabitha is "translated" Dorcas). Only "private tongues" is new—and it is precisely the one type with no example, no description, and no instruction anywhere in Scripture. Two of the three types are one thing; the third is the thing being smuggled in.

Claim 3: "1 Corinthians 14:14 proves it—'my mind is unfruitful'"

What they say: Paul describes praying with his spirit while his mind is unfruitful; therefore Paul practiced and endorsed mindless prayer. "It would take a pair of scissors to cut this out of the Bible."

The biblical answer: Read one more verse. Verse 14 is Paul's diagnosis of a problem; verse 15 is his stated resolution: "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding." Paul names the unfruitful mind as the defect and immediately corrects it—spirit and understanding together, always. Quoting v14 as an endorsement

requires stopping Paul mid-argument, before his own "What is the conclusion then?" Nobody needs scissors; they need to keep reading. The wider chapter treats the engaged mind as the mark of maturity: "in understanding be mature" (14:20).

Claim 4: "Paul spoke in tongues more than anyone (14:18) but not in church (14:19)—so he did it in his prayer closet"

What they say: If Paul out-spoke them all but would not do it in the assembly, the only place left is private prayer.

The biblical answer: This is an argument from silence—the prayer closet appears nowhere in the text; the interpreter supplies it. There is a far more obvious place Paul used tongues: the mission field. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, traveling continuously through regions speaking Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Lycaonian (Acts 14:11 notes a crowd's local language), and more. If tongues is the God-given ability to speak real languages for the gospel—the Acts 2 definition—then of course the church's greatest cross-cultural missionary exercised it "more than you all." And on the private-language view Paul's claim would be unverifiable and pointless as an argument—how would the Corinthians know what he did alone? As a missionary claim it carried real weight: the man rebuking their misuse possessed the genuine gift in greater measure than any of them.

Claim 5: "1 Corinthians 14:2 says tongues is prayer and praise to God"

What they say: "He who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God"—so tongues is Godward devotion by design.

The biblical answer: Context. Paul is describing what happens when a man speaks a language in an assembly where no one knows it: "no one understands him." That is the complaint, not the design. Only God understands—because God understands every language, not because the speech is a special channel to Him. Paul's remedies follow immediately: pray to inter-

ty into worship itself: if you bless in a tongue, how will the hearer "say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?" (14:16). Biblical prayer is Amen-able—it carries content another mind can affirm. A verse describing failed communication cannot be the charter for communication-free prayer.

Claim 6: "Romans 8:26 plus Jude 20—groans too deep for words"

What they say: When a burden is too big for normal words, the believer with the gift prays in the spirit (Jude 20), which is the Spirit interceding with groanings (Romans 8:26).

The biblical answer: Two texts, two problems. In Romans 8:26 the groanings are the Spirit's, not ours, and they are *alaletos*—unutterable, not spoken at all, by anyone. A verse about the Spirit's silent intercession cannot describe audible human syllables. And the Jude 20 / Ephesians 6:18 link self-destructs on the teachers' own premises: they correctly teach from 1 Corinthians 12:30 that not all believers speak in tongues—yet Jude 20 and Ephesians 6:18 command all believers to pray in the Spirit, "always, with all prayer." Hold both positions at once and Scripture commands every believer to do continually what only some can do at all. The equation collapses on arithmetic its defenders supplied. Praying in the Spirit means praying under the Spirit's guidance and power—which is why Jesus, the only person Scripture describes praying while "rejoicing in the Spirit," prayed in plain words (Luke 10:21), and why every recorded prayer in the Bible is intelligible.

Claim 7: "1 Corinthians 13:1—Paul acknowledged they prayed in the language of angels"

What they say: Paul affirms the Corinthians' angelic prayer language and simply ranks love above it: "that's great—but love matters more."

The biblical answer: Paul says no such thing—"that's great, you are doing that" appears nowhere in the text; it is read into a hypothetical. Look

at the structure: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels... though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge... though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains... though I give my body to be burned" (13:1–3). It is a series of deliberate hyperboles—the maximum imaginable of each gift—to make one point: without love, even the maximum is nothing. Did Paul understand all mysteries? He says the opposite: "we know in part" (13:9). Building a doctrine of angelic prayer language on 13:1 is like building a doctrine of mandatory martyrdom on 13:3. When angels actually speak in Scripture—to Abraham, Daniel, Mary, the shepherds—they speak the plain human language of their hearers, every time. And the one man who really did hear the speech of Paradise reported "inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Claim 8: "A credible man uttered syllables on a plane, and the stranger said, 'You have just said words that only my tribe speaks'"

What they say: This claim arrives as a story, and versions of it circulate constantly—in sermons, on podcasts, on social media—usually attached to a respected leader (one widely repeated telling involves a well-known California pastor). It runs like this: mid-flight, the leader feels a sudden, overwhelming urge to speak out loud in syllables he does not know. He dreads it, resists it, tries to wait it out—but it will not lift, so at last he quietly yields and speaks. The stranger in the next seat turns to him, stunned: 'You have just said words that only my tribe speaks.' The conclusion drawn: a credible man, an unplanned moment, a verified language—so the gift must be real today, just as it is practiced today.

The biblical answer: First, take the story at its word: that the syllables were a real tribal language, recognized by a native speaker. If true, the story is evidence for the real-language definition of tongues—and evidence against the private-prayer-language view, since the utterance had an audience, a language, and a hearer. The movement's best anecdote testifies for the other side. Second, look at the mechanics: "an uncontrollable urge... he dreaded doing it and tried to avoid it, but it was on him... he couldn't help

it." The same teachers elsewhere quote 1 Corinthians 14:32—"the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets... you can control it"—as their own safeguard. Both cannot stand. Scripture says the genuine gift never overrides the will; compulsion is the signature of ecstatic possession from Delphi to kundalini, not of the Spirit of self-control (Galatians 5:23). Third, doctrine is never built on unverifiable secondhand experience: "To the law and to the testimony!" (Isaiah 8:20). Experience is judged by the Word—never the reverse.

Claim 9: "'Do not forbid speaking in tongues'—it's literally a Bible verse"

What they say: Refusing the practice defies the direct command of 1 Corinthians 14:39.

The biblical answer: Amen to the verse—read whole: "do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order" (14:39–40). Paul forbids forbidding the genuine gift as the chapter has just defined and regulated it: a real language (14:10–11), two or three at most (14:27), one at a time (14:27), always interpreted (14:27), silent without an interpreter (14:28), under the speaker's full control (14:32), in a service without confusion (14:33). Declining a practice that fails every one of those tests is not forbidding tongues—it is obeying the very passage being quoted. The scissors cut both ways: to keep the modern practice you must cut out 14:27–28 and 14:40, plus Matthew 6:7, where Jesus' only instruction on private prayer prohibits heaping up unintelligible repetitions "as the heathen do" (*battalgeo*—to babble), the ecstatic prayer-noise of the priests of Baal (1 Kings 18:26–29) and the pagan cults.

Claim 10: "We're charismatic with a seat belt—order in public, liberty in private"

What they say: The balanced middle position: follow Paul's rules in church, but the private practice is between you and God.

The biblical answer: Look carefully at what the "seat belt" does: it applies every one of Paul's tests only where other people could evaluate the practice—and exempts the private version from all testing forever. No interpretation is possible (the speaker doesn't know what he is saying), no verification is possible, no edification of anyone is measurable, and there is no content to test against Scripture. A practice engineered to be untestable is not a biblical safeguard; it is the removal of every safeguard. And it inverts Paul's stated purpose: "tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers" (14:22)—a purpose these teachers themselves affirm when they admit the evidence of Spirit-filling in Acts is witness: "you shall be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8). They concede the gift's purpose is outward, then defend a use that is entirely inward, with no unbeliever, no hearer, and no witness in the room.

Claim 11: "Cessationism is the flimsiest argument ever—and abuse doesn't negate right use"

What they say: Since the gifts never ceased, and misuse doesn't cancel a gift, the practice stands.

The biblical answer: This swings at an argument the biblical case doesn't need. The question is not when tongues ceased; it is what tongues is. Even a full continuationist—someone who believes God can and does grant real languages for mission today—should reject the modern practice, because it matches the biblical description on no point: it is not language, not interpreted, not orderly, not directed at unbelievers, and not received the way Acts describes. "Abuse doesn't negate right use" is true—and irrelevant, because the right use is the biblical use, and the practice in question is not a misuse of the gift; it is a different phenomenon wearing the gift's name. As for history: the practice being defended has a documented birthday (Topeka, January 1, 1901), was originally claimed to be missionary languages, and was redefined as a "heavenly language" only after missionaries reached the field and discovered no one understood them (see §11). That is not the flimsy argument in the room.

Claim 12: The testimony—"I begged God for it, nothing happened, then a dream gave me the syllables"

What they say: This claim also arrives as a story—a personal testimony, told sincerely and publicly, and representative of thousands like it. One teacher's version: he begged God for the gift for months, in real spiritual agony, and nothing happened. He finally flew across the country so a well-known charismatic pastor could lay hands on him, and was counseled that God would "bypass your mind to teach you to pray with your spirit." Still nothing—until three days later, when a vivid dream came, and he woke with syllables "seared into my soul." He has prayed them ever since, and offers the account as proof the gift is real.

The biblical answer: The answer must be gentle, because the sincerity is real—and the account, taken at face value, is the strongest evidence in the episode that this is not the biblical gift. In Acts, the gift was never sought, begged for, incubated, or coached: it fell unsought on people who weren't expecting it (Acts 2), hadn't asked for it (Acts 10), and didn't know it existed (Acts 19)—instantly, fully formed, as verified real language. Months of seeking, a flight to a specialist, counsel to "just do it if you feel something," and a delayed onset through a dream is the biography of an acquired practice, not the pattern of Acts. Second, "God will bypass your mind" is the exact inversion of Paul's conclusion—"I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding" (14:15); "in understanding be mature" (14:20). Bypassing the mind is the method of the mystery cults, which deliberately suppressed reason to induce ecstasy; the Spirit's method is the opposite: "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2); love God "with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). A doctrine that requires God to circumvent the faculty He commands us to consecrate has identified its own source problem. Third, the syllables were never verified as language—by the speaker's own account he does not know what he is saying, in contrast to Acts 2, where native speakers confirmed the languages in real time. None of this judges the man's heart; it applies the test he himself endorsed: "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

When God still crosses the language barrier: what genuine accounts look like

One rule governs this section to the very end, and it cuts in both directions: stories prove nothing. Scripture judges experience—never the reverse. The accounts above were not rejected because they are stories; they were tested against the biblical description and failed it. But the same test can be run in the other direction—because holding the biblical definition of tongues does not mean believing God retired at the end of Acts. There are many stories on the other side of this ledger. When credible modern accounts describe God actually crossing a language barrier, notice what they look like.

Here is one I can offer firsthand. I stopped at a gas station and fell into conversation with a man, and I knew he was speaking French. I do not speak French—English and Spanish, nothing more. Yet as I began to share the gospel with him, I understood everything he said, and he understood everything I said. There was no frenzy, no trance, no loss of control; it was a peaceful, completely ordinary conversation—except that it should have been impossible. I shared Christ with him, I prayed for him, and we parted. To this day I cannot explain the mechanics of it. But notice the shape of the thing: a real language, two-way understanding, full self-control, the gospel at the center, and an unbeliever on the receiving end—every mark of Acts, and not one mark of the platform.

A second account has circulated widely in recent years out of an African village—a very modern example. A young man listened to an entire sermon and afterward remarked what a fine sermon it had been. Those around him were astonished and asked how he could possibly have understood it, since he did not speak the language it was preached in. His answer: what do you mean? The sermon was in English. It was not—the whole assembly had heard it in the local tongue. He alone heard it in his own language. That is the Pentecost dynamic from the hearer's side of the miracle: "how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?" (Acts 2:8)—a hearing miracle, with the gospel as its content.

Neither story is offered as proof—the same honesty demanded of the other side is owed here. They are offered as illustrations of a pattern: when God crosses the language barrier in credible accounts, the result looks like Acts—real language, understood by both sides, peaceful, unsought, and aimed at getting the gospel to someone. It does not look like ecstatic syllables no one can translate. The choice was never between the modern practice and a God who no longer acts. It is between a counterfeit that matches Delphi and a genuine article that still matches Pentecost.

Is citing these stories the same move this study condemned in Claim 8? No—and the difference is precise. The other side offers stories as proof of a doctrine Scripture nowhere describes; remove their stories, and the doctrine has nothing left standing. These stories are offered as illustrations of a doctrine Scripture everywhere describes; remove them, and the case is untouched—it rests on Acts 2, not on a gas station. Anecdotes may illustrate what the Bible teaches. They may never establish what it does not.

The pattern across all twelve claims

The teaching's own concessions assemble the refutation:

- **They concede glossa means language** —then defend non-language.
- **They concede not all speak in tongues (12:30)** —then equate tongues with praying in the Spirit, which all are commanded to do always (Jude 20; Eph 6:18).
- **They concede the speaker can control it (14:32)** —then celebrate a story of uncontrollable compulsion.
- **They concede the evidence of the Spirit is witness (Acts 1:8)** —then defend a use with no witness and no hearer.
- **They concede public use makes observers say "you're out of your mind" (14:23)** —conceding the practice cannot function as the sign Scripture says tongues is for (14:22).

The private prayer language survives none of its defenders' own premises. What Scripture describes is a real language, publicly verified, orderly, interpreted, and aimed at the lost. What is being defended is a sincere, learned, unverifiable practice with no biblical example, defended by half-verses whose second halves refute it. "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 14:37).

The final fallback: "You're limiting God"

When every argument above has been answered, the conversation usually ends with two last moves, and they deserve answers as direct as they are. The first: "You're putting God in a box." But God cannot lie (Titus 1:2) and does not change (Malachi 3:6)—holding God to His own word is not limiting Him; it is trusting Him. The box was never built by the person who believes what God said about how His Spirit works; if anything limits God, it is demanding that He certify Himself through sensations He never promised while setting aside the word He did. The second move: "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:14)—you're carnally analyzing what must be spiritually received." Read one verse further: "he who is spiritual judges all things" (2:15). Paul's point is the opposite of the use it is put to—spirituality produces more discernment, not less. When the Bereans heard the apostle Paul himself preach, they "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"—and Scripture calls them noble for it (Acts 17:11). Testing teaching against the word is not the natural man's skepticism; it is the spiritual man's obedience: "test all things" is a command (1 Thessalonians 5:21), and refusing to test is not reverence—it is disobedience wearing reverence's clothes.

CHAPTER 17

The Strategy of the Counterfeit

The word "counterfeit" has been used throughout this study, and it was chosen carefully. A counterfeit only exists where something genuine and valuable exists first—no one counterfeits worthless currency. And counterfeiting, not open opposition, has been the enemy's signature method from his first recorded ambition to his last recorded act. Lucifer's original sin was not "I will destroy the Most High" but "I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14). Imitation is his native language. The very title "antichrist" carries it: the Greek *anti* means not only against but in place of. Satan's masterworks are not attacks on the church from outside; they are substitutes offered inside—close enough to the genuine article to be accepted by the sincere.

17.1 The counterfeit runs through the whole Bible

Trace the method across Scripture and it is astonishingly consistent. It begins in Eden with a counterfeit word—"You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4), God's own sentence with one word inserted. It continues with counterfeit worship: Nadab and Abihu offering "strange fire" the Lord had not commanded—worship of the true God by a self-chosen method—and consumed for it (Leviticus 10:1–2); Aaron proclaiming the golden calf "a feast to the LORD" (Exodus 32:5)—not a new god by name, but the true God worshiped through a false form; Jeroboam building an entire counterfeit religious system—rival altars, a rival priesthood, and a feast "like the feast that is

in Judah" (1 Kings 12:32)—close enough to the genuine to keep the people from ever going back to Jerusalem. That phrase is the counterfeiter's entire craft: like the feast.

There are counterfeit miracles. When Moses' rod became a serpent, Pharaoh's magicians "did in like manner with their enchantments" (Exodus 7:11–12); they duplicated the blood and the frogs—sign for sign—until the third plague stopped them cold and they confessed, "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19). The counterfeit could imitate the spectacular; it could not create life. And the New Testament reaches back to name those very magicians as the pattern for the last days: "as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth" (2 Timothy 3:8)—resistance to truth not by denying the miraculous but by imitating it.

There is counterfeit prophecy. A lying spirit filled the mouths of four hundred court prophets, all agreeing, all wrong, against one Micaiah (1 Kings 22:22–23). God laments through Jeremiah: "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran... They speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD" (Jeremiah 23:16, 21). And Deuteronomy contains the most remarkable regulation in this whole field: if a prophet gives a sign "and the sign or the wonder comes to pass," but he leads you after other gods—"you shall not listen to the words of that prophet, for the LORD your God is testing you" (Deuteronomy 13:1–3). Read that carefully: a sign that works is explicitly declared insufficient. God Himself subordinates the sign test to the truth test. Whatever cannot be settled by manifestations was settled at Sinai.

There is even counterfeit spirituality that speaks true words. In Philippi, a slave girl with "a spirit of divination" followed Paul for days crying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). Every word was accurate—and Paul, grieved, turned and cast the spirit out (16:18). Correct-sounding content does not certify the spirit behind it; the enemy will happily speak truth if the association serves him. And there are counterfeit believers and ministers: tares sown among the wheat "while men slept," indistinguishable until the harvest (Matthew 13:25); wolves arriving "in sheep's clothing" (7:15); Judas betraying with a kiss—

counterfeit affection; Simon the sorcerer, who "astonished" Samaria with power and then offered money for the Holy Spirit, believing the gift was a technique for sale (Acts 8:9–24); the sons of Sceva, franchising an exorcism formula they had no relationship to back (Acts 19:13–16). Above them all stands the keystone text of this entire study:

2 CORINTHIANS 11:13–15 (NKJV)

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

Notice what Paul says deception looks like. Not darkness—light. Not blasphemy—righteousness. Not enemies of Christ—apostles of Christ. The most dangerous counterfeits in the world do not feel evil; they feel anointed. If Satan's ministers came with horns, no saint would ever have been deceived, and Paul's warning would be pointless. The warning exists precisely because the counterfeit is beautiful.

17.2 The counterfeit is the signature of the last days

When the disciples asked Jesus for the sign of His coming, His very first word was not about wars or earthquakes: "Take heed that no one deceives you" (Matthew 24:4). Deception is warning number one—and He specifies its form: "false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (24:24). Paul says the final deception operates "according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9)—wonders real enough in appearance, lying in what they certify—received by those "who did not receive the love of the truth" (2:10). The Spirit "expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1), amid a religion having "a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5). And Revelation's final crisis is not atheism—it is counterfeit religion working miracles: the land beast "performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven... and he dec-

eives those who dwell on the earth by those signs" (Revelation 13:13–14); "spirits of demons, performing signs" gather the kings of earth for the last battle (16:14). From Genesis to Revelation, the through-line holds: the enemy's chief weapon against the people of God is not persecution. It is imitation.

The most sobering words Jesus ever spoke are aimed exactly here:

MATTHEW 7:22–23 (NKJV)

Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

These are not pagans. They are religious people, addressing Jesus as Lord, with a resume of prophecy, exorcism, and wonders—in His name. And the wonders certify nothing. Jesus does not dispute their experiences; He disputes their credentials: "I never knew you." The mark of the genuine, He says in the preceding verse, is "he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (7:21). Manifestations are not the evidence. Obedient relationship to His word is.

17.3 Why a counterfeit gift of tongues fits the pattern

Set the modern tongues phenomenon inside this biblical frame and its strategic logic becomes visible. Consider what the enemy gains from a counterfeit of this particular gift. First, it discredits the genuine by association—an unbelieving world that watches ecstatic frenzy on religious television concludes the whole story of Pentecost was always this. Second, it trains millions of sincere believers to identify the Holy Spirit by sensation—and a believer who identifies God by feeling can be steered by any spirit capable of producing a feeling. Third, it redirects devotion from intelligible truth to contentless experience. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17)—the Spirit's actual instrument is the understood word, which is why the enemy's counterfeit specifically bypasses the understanding. Satan does not need a believer to hate Christ; he only needs him occupied with somet-

hing other than Christ's word. Fourth, it manufactures false assurance: where tongues is taught as the evidence of the Spirit, a learned vocal behavior becomes a substitute for the evidence Scripture actually gives—the fruit of a transformed life (Galatians 5:22–23; Matthew 7:20).

One final observation. Counterfeiters only copy valuable currency. The existence of a worldwide counterfeit of the gift of tongues is a backhanded testimony that the genuine gift was real, powerful, and precious—God truly did shatter the language barrier to send the gospel to every nation, and the enemy paid the gift the compliment of forging it. But examine the forgery and every property of the original has been reversed: real language has become non-language; the outward mission has become an inward experience; understanding has become a bypassed mind; self-control has become compulsion; a sign to unbelievers has become a badge among believers. The name was stolen; the substance was inverted. That inversion—the genuine article turned exactly inside out—is the counterfeiter's fingerprint, and it is why the next section is not optional caution but survival instruction. God's people are not asked to fear the counterfeit; they are commanded to test for it.

οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ἀκαταστασίας ὁ Θεὸς ἀλλὰ εἰρήνης

CHAPTER 18

Testing the Spirits: A Biblical Framework

Scripture does not leave us to guess. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1). Not everything that feels spiritual is from God; Satan himself "transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), and Jesus warned of false signs and wonders so convincing they would "deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24). Here is the test framework Scripture itself supplies:

- **The test of the Word (Isaiah 8:20).** Does the practice match what Scripture describes and command? Biblical tongues were real languages, intelligible, interpreted, orderly, and evangelistic. A practice that must redefine every one of those terms fails at the definition.
- **The test of edification (1 Cor 14:26).** "Let all things be done for edification." Does anyone learn, grow, or hear the gospel—or does the practice terminate on the experience of the practitioner?
- **The test of order (1 Cor 14:33, 40).** God is not the author of confusion. Chaos, frenzy, and loss of self-control are disqualifying marks, not credentials.
- **The test of self-control (1 Cor 14:32; Gal 5:23).** Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit of God does not seize, override, or possess;

compulsion and involuntary frenzy are the signature of other spirits—from Delphi to kundalini.

- **The test of fruit (Matt 7:15–20).** Judge movements and ministries over time by character, truthfulness, and outcomes—not by crowd size, sensation, or claimed miracles.
- **The test of Christ-exaltation (John 16:13–14).** The Spirit "will not speak on His own authority... He will glorify Me." A genuine work of the Spirit centers on Christ and His word—not on the experience, the anointing, or the man on the platform.

And hold the balance to the very end: the point of testing is not to bury the gifts but to keep them. The Spirit who distributed gifts at Corinth has not resigned. God still heals—every believer who prays for the sick believes so. He still gives preachers, teachers, evangelists, helps, and administrators; He still grants faith, wisdom, and generosity; and He remains free to cross any language barrier He chooses, as the accounts in chapter 16 illustrate. Nothing in this study asks you to expect less of God. It asks you to refuse imitations of Him. The believer who tests the spirits is not the one who doubts the Holy Spirit—he is the one who takes the Holy Spirit so seriously that he will not accept a substitute wearing His name.

CHAPTER 19

Conclusion

Is the gift of tongues from God? The biblical gift—absolutely. At Pentecost, God reversed Babel and armed a handful of Galileans with the languages of the world so that "the wonderful works of God" could reach every nation. The gift was real language, publicly verified, perfectly ordered, and aimed outward at the lost. Where it appears in Acts, the gospel is crossing a frontier; where it is regulated in Corinthians, the standard is intelligibility, interpretation, self-control, and love.

The modern phenomenon that borrowed its name is something else. It has a birthday (January 1, 1901), a birthplace (Topeka, Kansas), a documented redefinition (from missionary languages to "heavenly language" after the missionary claim failed), no linguistic substance under analysis, exact counterparts in pagan ecstatic religion, and a revival culture whose manifestations mirror kundalini awakening more closely than anything in the book of Acts. It systematically violates every regulation Paul wrote—many speakers at once, no interpretation, no evangelistic aim, no self-control—in services where confusion is treated as the very presence of God, though "God is not the author of confusion."

None of this requires questioning the sincerity of the millions who practice it. It requires exactly what Paul required of Corinth: bring every experience, however powerful, to the bar of Scripture. Not everything that feels spiritual is from God. And if a practice is modeled after the patterns of

Eastern mysticism, produces confusion instead of clarity, and cannot survive the tests God Himself gave us—then love for the truth, and love for the people involved, compels us to ask the question this study began with: is it biblical?

1 THESSALONIANS 5:19-21 (NKJV)

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good.

APPENDIX A

Scripture Reference Index

Origin of languages: Genesis 10; Genesis 11:1–9

Tongues in Acts: Acts 2:1–13, 41; Acts 10:44–48; Acts 11:15–17; Acts 19:1–7

Regulation of tongues: 1 Corinthians 12:1–2, 10–11, 28–30; 13:1–13; 14:1–40

Old Testament key: Isaiah 28:11–12 (quoted in 1 Cor 14:21); Isaiah 8:20

Discernment: 1 John 4:1; Matthew 7:15–20; Matthew 24:24; 2 Corinthians 11:14; Galatians 5:22–23; John 16:13–14; 1 Thessalonians 5:19–21

Private prayer language examined: Matthew 6:7–9; Luke 10:21; Ephesians 6:18; Jude 20; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 30; 14:15–16; 2 Corinthians 12:4; 1 Peter 4:10

Commonly cited in support of ecstatic tongues: Mark 16:17; Romans 8:26; 1 Corinthians 13:1; 14:2, 4, 14–15 (each addressed in §§8–9 and 14–15)

APPENDIX B

Timeline of the Modern Movement

- **c. AD 31**—Pentecost: the gift given as real languages (Acts 2).
- **2nd century**—Montanism's ecstatic prophecy rejected by the church.
- **4th–5th centuries**—Chrysostom and Augustine testify the gift had ceased in their era.
- **1700s–1830s**—Camisards, Shakers, Irvingites: fringe ecstatic episodes.
- **1801**—Cane Ridge camp meeting, Kentucky: mass falling ("slain in battle"), the jerks, barking, ecstatic laughter.
- **1880s**—Maria Woodworth-Etter, the "trance evangelist," makes falling and trance a platform practice; the lineage runs Woodworth-Etter → McPherson → Price → Kuhlman → Hinn.
- **Jan 1, 1901**—Topeka, KS: Agnes Ozman speaks in "tongues" at Parham's Bethel Bible School; modern movement born as claimed missionary xenoglossy.
- **1901–1910**—Missionary tongues claim fails in the field; tongues redefined as "heavenly language."
- **1906**—Azusa Street Revival, Los Angeles: global Pentecostalism launches.

- **1960**—Charismatic renewal enters mainline denominations (Dennis Bennett).
- **1980s**—"Third Wave" carries the practice into broader evangelicalism.
- **1980s–90s**—Benny Hinn, heir of Kathryn Kuhlman's touch-and-fall format, takes "slain in the Spirit" to global television scale.
- **1994–1995**—Toronto Blessing; Brownsville Revival: manifestation-centered revivalism.
- **2008**—Lakeland Revival (Todd Bentley): peak of manifestation revivalism; collapses within months amid moral failure; healing claims unverified by media investigation.

APPENDIX C

Sources and Further Reading

Every historical and scholarly claim in this study is checkable. Key sources:

- **Scripture.** New King James Version (quotations); King James Version (italics evidence); Greek New Testament, Textus Receptus (parallel tables).
- **Early church.** Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.6.1 (second-century report of languages); John Chrysostom, Homilies on First Corinthians, Homily 29 (the gifts' obscurity in his era); Augustine, Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of John 6.10 and On Baptism, Against the Donatists 3.16 (tongues as a sign adapted to its time).
- **Linguistics.** William J. Samarin, Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentecostalism (Macmillan, 1972); Felicitas D. Goodman, Speaking in Tongues: A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia (University of Chicago Press, 1972).
- **History of the modern movement.** Vinson Synan, The Holiness—Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century (Eerdmans, 1997); Robert Mapes Anderson, Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism (Oxford, 1979); Barton W. Stone's autobiographical account of Cane Ridge (1847); Maria B. Woodworth-Etter, Signs and Wonders (1916).

- **The falling lineage.** Benny Hinn, Kathryn Kuhlman: Her Spiritual Legacy and Its Impact on My Life (Thomas Nelson, 1998)—Hinn's own account of the Kuhlman–Price–McPherson chain; ABC News Nightline investigation of the Lakeland Revival (July 2008).
- From inside the movement and out. George E. Gardiner, *The Corinthian Catastrophe* (Kregel, 1974)—a former Pentecostal tongues-speaker's warning; Wayne A. Robinson, *I Once Spoke in Tongues* (Forum House, 1973); Ben Byrd, *The Truth About Speaking in Tongues*; Arthur L. Johnson, *Faith Misguided: Exposing the Dangers of Mysticism* (Moody, 1988); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word* (Banner of Truth, 1993); John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Moody, 1984), with the companion booklet *Are the Gifts for Today?* (Grace to You, gty.org).

Readers are encouraged to verify—that is the spirit of the whole study: "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This book may be downloaded free of charge, and shared freely, at ispeakintongues.com.