



Filled with the Spirit

Part 3: Is glossolalia a necessary component of the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

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This article focuses on whether speaking in tongues (glossolalia) is a necessary component of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

According to Old Testament prophecies, the coming of the Spirit in an unusual way would herald the dawn of the new age (see Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Joel 2:28,29). For the four-century intertestamental period, Israel had been without a significant prophetic voice. The situation changes dramatically when we observe the opening events of the New Testament era, which show the Holy Spirit once again at work among God's people.

Events connected with Jesus' birth signaled that the new covenant—the Age of the Spirit—was being inaugurated. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb (Luke 1:15). This very likely occurred at the time his mother Elizabeth was filled with the Spirit (verse 41). The Holy Spirit also came upon his father Zacharias and Simeon (Luke 1:67; 2:25-27). In addition, New Testament scholars regard Mary's song of praise as a Spirit-inspired utterance (Luke 1:46-55). Luke also mentioned that Anna was a prophetess (Luke 2:36).

It is best to think of the Age of the Spirit as an inclusive period extending from the announcement of John's birth to the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

The link throughout this period is Jesus Christ. Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at His baptism for His messianic mission (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22); He conducted His ministry in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14,16-19; Acts 10:38); and He poured out the Spirit on those who would continue and extend His anointed ministry (Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33).

SPIRIT-INSPIRED UTTERANCE PRIOR TO PENTECOST

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit manifested himself in a variety of ways. Virtually everything the New Testament says about His work and ministry is already found, in some way, in the Old Testament.² But in the Old Testament, the Spirit's most characteristic and most frequently occurring work was to give inspired utterance.

The Prophetic Books are predicated on the assumption that the Spirit inspired the writers (see 2 Peter 1:20,21). And there were many instances when persons prophesied orally at the Spirit's prompting. Repeatedly, we find accounts of people prophesying when the Spirit of the Lord came upon them (see Numbers 11:25,26; 24:2; 1 Samuel 10:6,10; 19:20,21). This oral inspiration of the Spirit to prophesy is the link connecting Old Testament oracular utterances with Joel's prediction that one day all God's people would prophesy (Joel 2:28,29), and with Moses' intense desire that all God's people might prophesy (Numbers 11:29).

In light of this, we see a connection between Spirit-inspired utterances in the Old Testament and comparable experiences of people in the pre-Pentecost, New Testament incidents recorded in Luke 1-4.³ But those accounts in Luke anticipate the wider, more inclusive, outpourings of the Spirit recorded in the Book of Acts.

Incidents recorded in Acts where believers experienced an initial infilling of the Spirit have a direct bearing on the

question of whether speaking in tongues is a necessary component of the baptism in the Spirit. In my judgment, the inductive approach is a legitimate means of trying to reach a conclusion. This methodology was employed from the earliest days of the Pentecostal movement to demonstrate that, based on the Acts accounts, tongues will indeed accompany one's initial infilling of the Spirit.

THE DISCIPLES AT PENTECOST (ACTS 2:1-21)

One immediately notices the three unusual phenomena that occurred on this day: "a noise like a violent, rushing wind," "tongues as of fire," and speaking "with other tongues" (Acts 2:1-4).⁴ The wind and fire are sometimes called theophanies-visible manifestations of God. As on historic occasions like the giving of the Law when there were thunder, lightning flashes, a thick cloud, and a very loud trumpet sound (Exodus 19:16), so on this historic day the Lord manifested himself in a most unforgettable way with heaven-sent wind and fire. Note that the wind and fire preceded the infilling of the Spirit; they were not part of it. Furthermore, nowhere else in Acts are they mentioned again in connection with people being filled with the Spirit. They were one-time occurrences to mark the beginning of a new era in God's dealings with His people.

The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is integral to the disciples' being filled with the Spirit. "And all were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them inspired utterance" (verse 4, translation mine).

The first important observation is that the phrase "inspired utterance" is a rendering of the Greek word *apophthengomai*, which is used in the Septuagint for supernaturally inspired speech, whether divine (1 Chronicles 25:1) or demonic (Micah 5:12). Especially important is the observation that this same word, which occurs only three times in the New Testament, is used in Acts 2:14 to introduce Peter's address to the crowd (he "declared to them"). Peter's speech was actually a prophetic utterance.

The specific terminology used in Acts is "to speak in tongues" (*lalein glossais*—2:4, with the adjective "other"; 10:46; 19:6). In that precise form, as well as with some variations, it is used by Paul throughout 1 Corinthians 12-14 in his treatment of spiritual gifts. It does not appear anywhere else in noncanonical literature as a technical term for an unusual occurrence whereby a person, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit (or any spirit), speaks a language unknown to him or her.

The languages spoken by the Pentecost disciples were identifiable, human languages—a phenomenon that is sometimes called *xenolalia* (speech in a foreign language). But there is no indication in the other two incidents in Acts (10:46; 19:6) that the languages were identified or understood. The important point is that the Greek word *glossa*, when used in the phrase *lalein glossais*, must mean language.

In Paul's treatment of the gift of tongues, he implies that the speech may sometimes be "with the tongues...of angels," which may refer to a type of heavenly language by means of which a believer communicates with God (1 Corinthians 13:1; 14:2).

The corollary gift of the interpretation of tongues indicates that languages, whether human or heavenly, are being interpreted. The various forms of the word *interpret* used in the New Testament point, with only one exception, to conversion from one language into another.

The word *all* in Acts 2:4 does double duty, being the subject of both main clauses: all were filled with the Spirit, and all spoke in tongues. To rephrase it: all who were filled with the Spirit spoke in tongues. There were no exceptions.

Peter identified the disciples' experience as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that the Lord would pour forth His Spirit upon all mankind (Acts 2:16-21). Joel's prophecy said, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." Yet Peter, in the midst of quoting Joel, added the words, "And they shall prophesy" (end of verse 18). Clearly, apart from all other elements in Joel's prediction, Peter stressed prophetic utterance as the key feature of the fulfillment.

Both oral prophesying and speaking in tongues involve the Holy Spirit coming upon a person and prompting the

person to speak out. The basic difference is that prophesying is in the common language, whereas speaking in tongues is in a language unknown to the speaker. But the mode of operation of the two gifts is the same.

Speaking in tongues could be called a specialized type of prophesying as to the manner in which it functions. In this sense, in view of the fact that God had ordained for something unique to happen on that day, the disciples' speaking in tongues was indeed a fulfillment of Joel's prediction that the Lord's people would prophesy.

CORNELIUS' HOUSEHOLD AT CAESAREA (ACTS 10:44-48)

Several observations in this narrative are pertinent:

1. Peter clearly identifies the experience of Cornelius' household with that of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost (11:15-17; 15:8). To illustrate: common terms such as "baptized in/with the Holy Spirit," "poured out," and "gift" appear in both accounts.

2. The outward, observable manifestation of glossolalia convinced Peter's Jewish-Christian companions that the Spirit had indeed fallen on these Gentiles. "For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God" (10:46). However one expresses it, glossolalia was the evidence or sign of the Gentiles' baptism in the Spirit.

3. These Gentiles were "speaking in tongues and exalting (megaluno) God." Very likely, "exalting God" indicates what they were saying in tongues (even though, apparently, the glossolalia was not understood). The Greek word for and sometimes introduces an explanatory note on what precedes it and may be translated that is.⁵ They were "speaking in tongues, that is, exalting God." This is related to the noun form of the verb megaluno that occurs in Acts 2:11, where the people say, "We hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds (megaleia) of God." In other words, speaking in tongues often involves prayer or praise to God (1 Corinthians 14:2,14,15).

The two incidents discussed so far (Pentecost in Acts 2 and Cornelius in Acts 10,11,15) indisputably connect speaking in tongues with the Spirit baptism of the recipients. In fact, the specific terminology "baptized in/with the Holy Spirit" occurs in Acts only in connection with these two accounts (Acts 1:5; 11:16). These observations are important because the two incidents bracket two others found in chapters 8 and 9 and will help in understanding them.

THE SAMARITANS (ACTS 8:14-20)

The Samaritans had witnessed signs performed by Philip (demon expulsions, healings), had responded in faith to the message about Christ, and had submitted to water baptism. But they had not yet received the Holy Spirit (verse 15; see verses 17,19); "He had not yet fallen upon any of them" (verse 16).

As Luke uses the phrase "receive the Spirit," it is synonymous with other terminology he uses such as "being baptized in the Spirit," "the Spirit falling upon" or "coming upon people," "the gift of the Spirit," "being filled with the Spirit" (see Part 1 of this series). In the New Testament, "receiving the Spirit" is a flexible term whose meaning depends upon a particular writer's intent and the context in which it occurs. It is inappropriate, for example, to try to force Luke's meaning of the term on Paul or Paul's meaning on Luke. This is a valid principle of biblical interpretation.

The important element in this narrative is that the Samaritan believers had a postconversion experience of the Spirit, which was mediated through Peter and John by the laying on of hands. Something unusual took place on that occasion, for why would Simon want the authority to impart such a gift? What was it that he desired so inordinately?

Luke simply says that "Simon saw [Greek horao/eidon] that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands" (verse 18). This Greek verb is very common in the New Testament; its basic meaning is to see. But it has the meaning also of perceive or experience. What took place was so unusual that even Simon was singularly impressed. The only thing that could have arrested his attention was the unique phenomenon of speaking in tongues. In light of the absolutely clear identification of tongues with Spirit baptism in the two major accounts that bracket this one (in Acts 2,10), it hardly seems that Luke would have thought it necessary to mention tongues specifically here.

Simon saw something; therefore, the traditional Pentecostal understanding of this incident is not really an argument from silence. It is based in part on the unambiguous association of tongues with Spirit baptism in the two main accounts that precede and follow this incident.

SAUL OF TARSUS (ACTS 9:17)

One purpose of the laying on of Ananias' hands was that Saul might "be filled with the Holy Spirit." This account also falls between the two major accounts which unambiguously associate glossolalia with individuals being initially filled with the Holy Spirit. But Luke does not record any details of Paul's Spirit baptism. It is certain, however, that Paul spoke in tongues regularly and often. He considered himself to be the archglossolalist: "I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all" (1 Corinthians 14:18).

In the Book of Acts, the experience of speaking in tongues first occurs at the time of Spirit baptism. It seems perfectly legitimate and logical for Pentecostals to infer that Paul first spoke in tongues at the time Ananias laid hands on him.

THE EPHESIAN DISCIPLES (ACTS 19:1-7)

What did Paul mean when he asked the Ephesian men, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2). In his epistles, receiving the Spirit is a component of the salvation experience (see Romans 8:15; Galatians 3:2,14). But the question shows that for Paul the expression could have an additional meaning.⁶

The narrative is clear about the meaning of Paul's question. He is alluding to the experience which they will indeed have shortly, when "they began speaking with tongues and prophesying" (verse 6)—the only other reference to the Spirit after verse 2. The terminology in this account is parallel to that found in previous accounts of people being filled with the Spirit: "receive the Holy Spirit" (verse 2), "the Holy Spirit came on them" (verse 6), "speaking with tongues" (verse 6).

On the basis of verse 6, which says the Ephesians spoke in tongues and prophesied, some assume that not all spoke in tongues—some spoke in tongues and some prophesied—and that either tongues or prophecy may accompany the experience. Focusing on this verse, I offer the following observations.

1. If prophesying is an alternative to tongues as an indication of Spirit baptism, this is the only place in Acts that might suggest it. It is not sound hermeneutical practice to base a belief on only one passage of Scripture. If Acts 2 is programmatic, glossolalia fulfills Joel's prediction, not prophecy per se.

2. A closer look at the Greek text permits, even suggests, the following translation: "The Holy Spirit came upon them. Not only did they speak in tongues, but they also prophesied."⁷ Luke, then, is correlating this account with the previous accounts that record speaking in tongues by the recipients of the Spirit (2:4; 10:46) and says that the men, in addition to speaking in tongues, also prophesied.

Some suggest that Luke means to say, "they spoke in tongues, that is, they prophesied," relating the statement to "they spoke in tongues, that is, they exalted God" (10:46). But the Greek text of 10:46 has only the word *kai* (and, that is), whereas the text of 19:6 reads differently (see endnote 7).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Inspired utterance when the Spirit comes upon people recurs throughout biblical history—in the Old Testament, in the beginning days of the new age (Luke 1-4), and in accounts recorded in the Book of Acts.

Speaking in tongues, in one important sense, is a specialized form of prophecy. As such, its occurrence on the Day of Pentecost and on subsequent occasions is indeed a fulfillment of Joel's prediction that all God's people would prophesy.

The narrative of the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is paradigmatic. It becomes the model or paradigm for later outpourings of the Spirit. The term programmatic is sometimes used for this concept.

Parallel to the inductive approach, which sees a pattern of glossolalia in Spirit baptisms, is the contribution of a contemporary approach to interpretation sometimes called narrative theology. As it relates to this subject, Donald A. Johns says:

It is a common storytelling technique the world over to tell things in groups of threes: three times should be enough to tell anything. The paradigmatic effect of these stories should lead us to expect the same things in our own experience with the Spirit. Actually, as we are drawn into the story, we should experience the Spirit along with Peter, Cornelius, and all the rest.⁸

Throughout the Old Testament, the early chapters of Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts, there is a pattern of inspired speech when the Holy Spirit comes upon people.

The viewpoint of some is that glossolalia may be the normal accompaniment of Spirit baptism but that it cannot be considered normative; that is, tongues will not occur invariably. Yet the "all" of Acts 2:4 and the "for" of 10:46 speak tellingly against such a position.

Does Paul's question in 1 Corinthians 12:30 undercut the Pentecostal position: "Not all speak in tongues, do they?" (translation mine)? The answer to Paul's question must be no, based on the form of the question in Greek. But Paul, in context, is talking about the manifestation of tongues as it occurs in the assembly of believers. Not all are called upon to give public utterances in tongues. This understanding is justified in view of the following question: "Not all interpret, do they?" (translation mine). Furthermore, Paul himself expresses a wish that all God's people would speak in tongues (verse 5), evidently in private, as a means of spiritual self-edification (verse 4).

In conclusion, the Pentecostal doctrine of initial, physical evidence is substantiated by an investigation of Scripture. The terminology, though not divinely inspired, is an attempt to encapsulate the thought that at the time of Spirit baptism, the believer will speak in tongues. It conveys the idea that speaking in tongues is an immediate, empirical accompaniment to the baptism in the Spirit.

ENDNOTES

1. Glossolalia is a technical term often used for speaking in tongues, being a combined form of the Greek words *lalia* (speech, speaking) and *glossa* (tongue, language).
2. For example, His role in creation, in striving with humanity over sin, in guiding workmen in the construction of the temple, in physically transporting people, in giving life, in what the New Testament calls spiritual gifts.
3. This is with the correct understanding that the concept of prophesying focuses on the source and means of an utterance and may or may not include a predictive element.
4. All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.
5. Technically called the *epexegetical* use of the word.
6. Luke faithfully records the essence of Paul's question. He has not: (1) put his own words into Paul's mouth; (2) edited or revised Paul's question to conform to his own (Luke's) theological agenda; (3) created the entire incident to advance his own theological purposes. Luke, it must be remembered, is an accurate historian.
7. For the student of Greek, the construction *te...kai* is common in the Book of Acts. Translation possibilities are: as...so; not only...but also.
8. "New Dimensions in Hermeneutics," a chapter in *Initial Evidence*, Gary B. McGee, ed.

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