

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Fortieth Week - Fourth Day

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. 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?'" (Acts 2:1-7).

The "tongues of fire" that rested on the heads of the apostles was no vain show. They were a sign, and the fact indicated by that sign was at once known to be a reality by what took place: *"They were all filled with the Holy Ghost,"* by which words the sacred historian clearly means that they then received in full measure, through the Spirit of God, all the blessings from on high that their Master had so often promised them. They were at once enlightened, instructed, cheered, exalted, inspired.

This was so well known to have been expected that the historian does not dwell upon the fact but passes on to specify a most extraordinary endowment, one that excited great amazement and of which those in the evangelical circle had been distinctly unprepared: *"They began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."* That is to say, they began to preach the gospel in languages they had not previously known but of which the mastery was at once given them.

Much has been said in order to divest this fact of its miraculous character. But it is all in vain; for no other hypothesis will agree with what ensued or will meet all the circumstances of the case. It was *necessary* that these men, who belonged to one small nation and spoke one of the least diffused languages, should know the languages of the nations among whom they were to labor. It was also requisite that they should either be inspired with the knowledge of these foreign languages and thus qualified for immediate work, or that they should sit down laboring to learn them for many weary years, during which the gospel would not be preached. There

was, therefore, every reason to expect that the Lord would, in that age of miracles, remove such a discouragement from the path of his servants. It was the Lord's purpose that his word should at once be freely promulgated and be glorified among the nations.

There were then present at the feast of Pentecost Jews from many different regions. These regions are specified as extending from the Euxine to the Indian Ocean, and from the Persian Gulf to the Tyrrhenian Sea, and the coast of Africa. Many of these foreign Jews, together with the native Jews, flocked to the spot as soon as the report of this marvelous transaction had spread throughout the city. The native Jews did not understand what was said and therefore derided the speakers as drunken men. But the strangers were astonished, because they recognized their own various languages and said to each other, "Behold, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? We do hear them speak in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."

Perceiving their perplexity the apostles stood up, and Peter proceeded (after vindicating themselves of such scoffing) to explain the real nature of the miraculous transaction. In a most noble sermon he declares the great doctrine of Christ crucified for their sins and raised again for their justification. This was the first evangelical sermon, and it was gloriously acknowledged by the Holy Spirit under whose influence it was delivered; for they that heard it were "pricked in their heart" and cried out, "What shall we do?" The answer was ready. They should repent and be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus for the remission of sins, thereby attesting their belief in Him as their Messiah and Redeemer and expressing their purpose of heart to become his followers and disciples.

Moved by the Spirit, thousands received his words into their hearts and were baptized. This was a glorious triumph well suited to encourage the apostles in the labors that lay before them; for it showed them that there was no limit to their holy conquests, seeing that they were to be won "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

That so many foreign Jews heard the apostles speak in their own languages implies that they each spoke different ones, and not that all languages were at once known to and spoken by everyone who received this gift. To each was given the power of speaking those languages he would have occasion to use in the course of his ministering, and it is possible that additional languages were given when the occasion for their use arose. If a stranger should come to a place where he clearly could not speak its language, but who suddenly acquired power to preach in that language with energetic ease, this would be a sign equally impressive as that seen on the Day of Pentecost. And Paul declared that he himself spoke "with tongues more than you all" (1 Cor. 14:18), thus corroborating our view that the missionary travels of the apostle to the Gentiles were most extensive, and he had need of many languages in order to preach the gospel in the various lands to which he went.