

STUFF YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MIRACLES & SPEAKING IN TONGUES

In a day and age when the term “miraculous” is used for everything from sporting events to hair shampoo, we will strive to bring some understanding of what God’s Word, the Holy Bible says about miracles. Do they still happen today? What is their purpose anyway? And why “tongues”? This one particular gift of speaking in tongues may be the most maligned, misunderstood, and yet wonderful, personally-empowering gift of God to mankind. But let’s start at the beginning...

Strictly speaking, when we say “miracles” we refer to historic events or natural phenomena which appear to **violate** or transcend **natural laws** but which reveal God to people. A helpful way of understanding the meaning of miracles is to examine the various terms for miracles used in the Bible.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament use the word **sign** to denote a miracle that points to a deeper revelation. **Wonder** emphasizes the effect of the miracle, causing awe and even terror. A **work** points to the presence of God in history, acting for mankind. The New Testament also uses the word **power** to emphasize God’s acting in strength. These terms often overlap in meaning. They are more specific than the more general term “miracle.”

In the Old Testament, God is the Creator and sustainer of all life. God’s people thought of the world as God’s **theater** for displaying His **glory** and **love**. Miracles proved God’s presence as a revelation to people of **God’s love**.

When God parted the water for the Israelites, or when He saved Israel in Egypt through the Passover, God revealed His **character**; and the Israelites were convinced that God was working for their **salvation**. Miracles were expressions of God’s saving love as well as His holy **justice**.

As with the Old Testament, the New Testament miracles are essentially expressions of God’s salvation and glory.

Why did Jesus perform miracles? Jesus answered this question Himself. When in prison, John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to Jesus to see if He was the “Coming One” [meaning Savior or Messiah (Matt. 11:3)]. Jesus told them to inform John of what He had done: “The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (11:5). With these words, Jesus declared that His miracles were the fulfillment of the **promises of the His kingdom** as foretold by Isaiah (24:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1). Jesus’ miracles were signs of the presence of the kingdom of God (Matt. 12:39).

This theme of the miracles pointing to the kingdom of God is especially brought out in the Gospel of John. John presented the miracles of Jesus as “signs” on seven occasions: John 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-18; 6:1-15; 6:16-21; 9:1-41; and 11:1-57.

These miracles pointed to deep **spiritual truth**, and demanded **obedient faith** (John 2:11, 23-25).

Jesus also understood His miracles as evidences of the presence of the kingdom in His ministry. Every miracle story was a sign that God's **salvation** was present. But not only did the kingdom come; it came in great power, because the dead were raised (Is. 26:19; Luke 7:11-15) and Satan was bound (Mark 3:27). What is especially awesome is that Jesus' miracles were also performed upon the most unlikely people. Jesus consciously brought the salvation of God to those who were **rejected**. He healed the lame (Matt. 9:1-8), the mute (Matt. 9:32-33), and lepers (Luke 17:11-19). Jesus brought the kingdom to all, regardless of their condition.

But one important thing for every person to understand is that Jesus' miracles were not **theatrical sensations**. He demanded **faith** of others (Matt. 9:2). And most importantly for our present study, Jesus expected the disciples to do miracles and rebuked them for their "little faith" and unbelief (Matt. 17:20).

Miracles give us a deeper understanding of Jesus. He is Lord over nature (Mark 4:35-41) and death (Luke 8:41-56; John 11:1-44). He is the Suffering Servant who bears the sicknesses of others (Matt. 8:16-17). He is the **Messiah** who was to come (Matt. 11:2-6).

I must state this emphatically: Jesus' miracles give evidence that He is the Son of God, the Messiah, and since the Bible declares that He is alive and that He is "the same, yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8) it must be understood that He **still does** the same things He did when physically on this earth.

This is seen in the recorded history of those who have followed in His footsteps and especially in the book of Acts. The Acts of the Apostles is a book of miracles. Again, these miracles are a continuation of the miracles of Jesus, made possible **through the Holy Spirit**. The miracles were done in the name of Jesus and were manifestations of **God's salvation** (Acts 3:11).

God began His church with a powerful display of miracles. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came on the people with great power, causing them to speak in **tongues** (Acts 2:1-13), leading to **conversions** (Acts 2:41). When Philip went to Samaria, the Spirit of God anointed him with power (Acts 8:4-40), and the same happened with Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48). These powerful wonders were designed again to convince of Jesus' role as **Savior** for **all** the people of the earth. But what is interesting to note is that these miracles done by Jesus through His servants were also a sign that authenticated the **ministries** of those humble servants of God through whom they happened. This in no way means that all who do miracles are "of God" for we indeed are warned that the devil and His servants can do supernatural things to lead people away from Jesus. What is true is that those who do minister to others to get them closer to Jesus can expect divine validation!

The lists of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament show miracles were one of the means by which believers ministered to others (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11-12). This is sufficient evidence to verify that the working of miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of Jesus Christ is still intended in the church today, and available for ministry through any believer filled with God's Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians, the book in the NT that deals most specifically with how believers should work with God regarding His miraculous power, we are **mandated by God** to earnestly desire supernatural spiritual gifts; that is, we are to pursue **both** the gifts of the Spirit and the spirit in which the gifts should be used, which is love. The backdrop of this study is the understanding that Paul's instruction to the Corinthians was not **to stop** the move of the Spirit, but rather to **correct** their lack **of love** as they pursued being used in ways God grants every believer to be used. Paul was offering wonderful guidelines that every believer or gathering could look to to discern if they were in obedience to God's intentions in the outpouring of His Spirit.

Without a doubt, the pouring out of God's Spirit, known as the **Pentecostal Revival**, of the early 1900s, and the **Charismatic Renewal**, which had its beginnings in the early 1950s, together constitute one of the most powerful and impacting spiritual renovations in world history. Indeed, at the beginning of 1900 only **1 in 27** people on earth were Christian of any sort. With the church's renewed vision to obey the command of Jesus in Luke 24:49 to wait on Him until power came **for witness**, and with the outpouring of the Spirit (and with Him all His supernatural gifts), we began the new millennium with **1 in 5** on earth claiming some form of allegiance to Christ! That is why many have named this past century The Pentecostal Century.

We must realize that the Church needed, and in a regular sense still needs, a regular **renewal of mission** and **purpose**. We must all (corporately and individually) seek to go back to authentic Christianity as we see it lived out in the Book of Acts. This Christianity obeyed the command of Jesus to make disciples of the nations to the degree that they were accused of turning the world upside down!

In view of this need for renewal, there has been a definite move on the part of sincere believers to recover **the power of the Holy Spirit** that is demonstrated in Acts. In this pursuit to be empowered and transformed by the Spirit in order to make Jesus known to the world, a movement began through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by **speaking in tongues**, among believers in every **denomination**. This demonstrated that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not a denominational thing, fringe movement, or emotional experience, but rather an **endowment of spiritual power** for **intensive service**.

This Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is a manifestation of the person of the Holy Spirit at work. It is also the byproduct of accounts in Acts being rediscovered and applied by God's Church.

The Book of Acts provides five accounts of people receiving the fullness or infilling or baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 8:14-25; 9:17-20; 10:44-48; 19:1-7). In all these accounts, there are **five common factors**:

1. There was an enormous inbreaking of God's presence experienced **by all who were present.**
2. There was an **evident transformation** in the lives and witness of the disciples who were filled.
3. What they experienced in the baptism of the Spirit became the impetus for individuals coming to **faith in Christ** as they **preached** every day, everywhere, with **miracles** confirming their message.
4. The **immediate** evidence of their filling was **praying in tongues**, either seen directly in all these texts, or in the people after their experience.
5. The ultimate purpose of this experience was **empowered witnessing** (Acts 1:8) and a **deeper dimension of Christian commitment** for the achievement of happiness (Ephesians 5:18, 19), gratitude (Ephesians 5:20), humility (Ephesians 5:21), and **fruitfulness** (Galatians 5:22-23).

Together the above facts demonstrate what the present Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal is experiencing through the Holy Spirit at work in the church. The problems that exist regarding this move of the Spirit arise from a lack of biblical knowledge on the part of many believers regarding the role of "tongues" and the other gifts of the Spirit. We need, in our pursuit of Christian maturity, to develop a common bond of unity in the practice of "speaking with tongues" in prayer and worship, together with an acceptance and welcoming of the operation of the Holy Spirit's gifts in our midst. This study, already long, cannot discuss all the various gifts of the Spirit, so we will concentrate on the one most misunderstood by people today.

The baptism in the Spirit is an experience **subsequent to getting born-again**: one that comes about through a process of **yielding one's complete self** into the guidance and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We agree that the Holy Spirit is operative in **every believer** and in the varied ministries of the church. Still, every believer must answer the question of **Acts 19:2**: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit since you believed?"

We must qualify two statements. By "baptism in the Spirit" we do not mean the baptism of the Spirit into the Body of Christ upon conversion (1 Corinthians 12:13). The baptism in/with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33; Acts 1:5, Mark 1:8) was and is **directed by Jesus** to be received (John 20:22; Acts 1:8) as a gift given following His ascension (John 7:39; Acts 2:38, 39). To baptize means, "**To immerse in so as to change the character of**". That is the baptism in/with the Spirit!

The second statement to clarify is what we mean by, “*A process of yielding one’s complete self into the guidance and indwelling of the Holy Spirit*”. We do not mean **passivity of mind** or getting into **a trance**! We simply refer to an assertive, prayerful heartfelt quest for God! The **mind** is active in worship, the **emotions** are warmed by God’s love, and the **physical** participates cognitively as worship is expressed with an upraised voice.

Before we get into a study of tongues, to complete our backdrop and maintain our biblical integrity, we must offer the following:

Often, people make the comment that not everyone will have gifts or speak or pray in tongues. The problem arises from attempting to **separate the person** of the Spirit from **all His attributes**. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul states that **everyone** is given **the manifestation** of the Spirit. The gifts, ministries and effects of the Spirit are merely an expression of **the one Spirit** who is already in the believer who **has received** the infilling! If you have the Spirit and He has you, how can you not have all that comes with Him? The believer filled with the Spirit has resident within him incredible power and gifts, and has the responsibility to do what we have already stated earlier from 1 Corinthians 14:1: desire the **spiritual sensitivity to be used** in the gifts for the benefit of the others.

Now let’s look at:

The twofold function of the gift of tongues

The Bible describes two basic functions of “tongues”: it is for **personal edification** and **public exhortation**. [We must also note, though, that the early church clearly saw the ability to pray in tongues as **the sign of the presence** of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said it would be a sign (Mark 16:17), as did Paul (1 Corinthians 14:22), and Peter (see Acts 10:44-46 with 11:16-17 & 15:7-9). Thus, speaking in tongues is a properly expected indication of the **fullness of the Spirit.**]

Tongues for personal edification. “Speaking in tongues” is a **devotional help** to the believer who is “weak and does not know how to pray as He should” (**Romans 8:26, 27**). When praying **to God** this devotional use of tongues need not be interpreted. This is also true when the church gathers. At times of corporate worship and prayer, when all speech is directed **toward God**, it is appropriate to address God in this Holy Spirit given form of expression. In line with this, here are the Biblical reasons for speaking in tongues:

- 1) It is a unique gift associated with the Body of Christ.** All the other gifts, miracles and manifestations were in evidence prior to Pentecost during OT times. God uniquely ordains this gift for the church. (1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:21)
- 2) It is a specific fulfillment of prophecies by Isaiah and Jesus.** See Isaiah 28:11 with 1 Corinthians 14:21, Mark 16:17 with Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 14:5, 14-18, 39.
- 3) It is proof of the resurrection of Jesus.** John 16:7; Acts 2:26-33.
- 4) It is evidence of the infilling of the Spirit.** See above paragraph.

- 5) **It is a spiritual gift for necessary self-edification.** 1 Corinthians 14:4; Jude 20.
- 6) **When directed as speech to others, and accompanied by interpretation, it spiritually edifies the church.** 1 Corinthians 14:5
- 7) **It is a spiritual means of rejoicing.** 1 Corinthians 14: 15; Ephesians 5:18-19.
- 8) **It is one confirmation of the Word when it is preached.** Mark 16: 17, 20; 1 Corinthians 14:22.

Tongues for public exhortation. Considering our discussion above, we need not take long for this. Public “tongues” denotes when the person who is speaking in other tongues is doing it in such a way as to be **addressing people**, not God. For example, this occurs during corporate gatherings when there is a general quiet in the congregation and one person begins to raise their voice and speak in the Spirit and no one else does. It is clearly designed as a **message to the people**. To maintain spiritual integrity and honor the Word, this **must be interpreted**. It is only through interpretation that “public tongues” can be edifying and not out of order. It is of utmost importance to note that each Spirit-filled believer can exercise **self-control** and not **disrupt a gathering** because they just couldn’t stop themselves. Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way (**1 Corinthians 14:40**).

We have covered an amazing amount of ground in this study. What is important to remember in all of this is the following:

- 1) The most important thing in life is to yield oneself completely to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.
- 2) After a person becomes a believer in Christ, they have available to them an endowment of power known as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit whereby they receive supernatural power to live for Jesus and manifest the fact that He is Savior of the world to those they minister to.
- 3) This Baptism in the Spirit enables every believer to pray in tongues (which grants them power in their devotional life), as well as to do all the miracles Jesus did, as evidenced by Christians in the book of Acts and historically to this day.

I conclude this study with the question we asked earlier, the question the Word of God asks each of us in Acts 19:2:

“Did you receive the Holy Spirit since you believed?”