

Tongues: Their Dispensational Significance

1 Cor. 14.22 tells us that tongues were a **"sign" not to them which believe but to them that believe not.**

This statement from Paul follows his quote from Isaiah 28 where he says:

"With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people and yet for all that they will not hear me saith the Lord".

For those who insist that we must stick to context, then please do. The tongues were meant as a "sign" of impending "judgement" for unbelieving Israel, they had the formula from the OT scriptures, i.e. Isaiah 28, to understand exactly what was happening and that is what Paul is emphasising. The tongues were not "unknown tongues", the word unknown which appears 6 times in ch. 14 is not in the original, these were languages which being of Gentile orientation were being presented to them to convince the nation that their season (1 more year: Luke 13.6 - 9) of opportunity was fast running out. Acts 28 brought this period to a close. Peter had carried the message of repentance to the Jews living inside the land and Paul had went to the "Jew first" to those living outside the land. It was becoming very clear to the Apostle that the national repentance God required was not going to take place and that imminence of the Lords coming which all the earlier epistles were anticipating with Christ returning to be King were beginning to seem more and more unlikely. Paul knew that there was something more God had to reveal to him but it could not be until the appropriate time. He tells us for the first time in Acts 26.16 more of the details of what the Lord had actually said to him at his conversion, *"to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee"*. Paul knew there was more to follow, he was not sure exactly what, it was like looking into a polished copper mirror, it was hazy, but he knew that there was something to come which would bring completion (perfect/complete), and when it would come then the partial, immature, childish things would be needed no longer. Though now hazy then it would be as clear as a summer's day.

At Acts 28 having reached Rome with the Pentecostal gifts (powers of the age to come), still mightily at work as evidenced on Melita by the viper's bite not killing Paul, the healing of Publius's father in law and the rest of the people on the island who had diseases came to him and were cured, not one went away disappointed, a far cry from the ridiculous "faith healing" we see demonstrated by deceivers today, Paul arranges a conference with the "chief of the Jews", this was not a gospel service but his opportunity to present to those Jewish leaders the truth concerning the "kingdom of God". Their re-action and division over what he said brought this response, a prophetic utterance made by Isaiah in ch. 6.9

"Go to this people and say, hearing ye shall hear and not understand, (tongues), and seeing ye shall see and not perceive, (miracles of healing etc.); For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; Lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart and should be converted, and I should heal them; Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent (commissioned/apostolos) to the Gentiles and they will hear it" Acts 28.25-28.

The '1 more year' had come to a close, the opportunity for national repentance was withdrawn, and the Gentiles were to be given the gospel independently of the Jew, who for so long had it preached to them exclusively and after Acts 10 until Acts 28 had it offered to them always first, (the Jew first). That era/dispensation/administration was at an end. Israel were entering their Lo-ammi, (not my people Hos. 1.9) period which has stretched out until now, national blindness, which had been prophesied because of their own stubbornness had set in and all the kingdom promises were now placed in abeyance awaiting fulfilment in a day yet future. The tongues had now served their purpose, the sign gifts were about to be withdrawn and Paul was getting ready to receive the greatest revelation of all, a revelation made exclusively to him to share with those who read and believe what he writes. That which is *"teleios"* complete and which would "fulfill the word of God" was about to be revealed. It is to be carefully noticed as has been pointed out that in the 7 epistles Paul writes after Acts 28 there is never again mention of the gift "tongues", "healings" or miracles of any kind, the day for that was over, childish things, immaturity and what was never intended to continue

must be done away/put away/fail, these are all from the same Greek root, because they were needed no longer. What was that which brought completion/fulfilment? We will let Paul explain from one of his epistles written after the Acts period while he was in prison in Rome, *"According to the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you (Gentiles), to fulfil the word of God, even the mystery, which has been hid from ages and generations, but NOW is made manifest to the saints"*, Colossians 1.25-26 cp Ephesians 3.1-13. So what was it that brought completion and fulfilment and brought the period of "sign gifts" to a close? Not the completion of the full canon of scripture, but the revelation of the "Mystery" the master plan of God not revealed until Israel had been set aside during this "dispensation of the grace of God".

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