

CHAPTER 1

TONGUES PREDICTED
BY CHRIST

Mark 16

Following His resurrection and prior to His return to the right hand of the Majesty on high, the Lord Jesus gave commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen (Acts 1:2). One such command is recorded in Mark 16:15: “Go ye into *all the world*, and preach the gospel *to every creature*.” Christ sent His disciples to herald the good news to every kindred and tongue and people and nation—*to every creature*.

The worldwide scope of this commission stands in marked contrast to another commission, one that our Lord gave to the very same men just a couple of years earlier:

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:5-6).

Prior to the cross our Lord's ministry was confined to *a nation*. Today the gospel is proclaimed among *all nations*. Israel was once the center of God's program. Today God has Christian assemblies (local churches) scattered throughout the world. Jerusalem was the focal point during the previous dispensation. Today, Jerusalem is merely recognized as the starting point of God's new program (Luke 24:47).

The great commission revealed for the first time this significant shift from *one nation* to *every nation*. Notice the worldwide scope of the great commission:

As recorded by Matthew:

“teach *all nations*” (28:19)

As recorded by Mark:

“Go ye into *all the world*” (16:15)

“Preach the gospel *to every creature*” (16:15)

“[they] preached *everywhere*” (16:20)

As recorded by Luke:

“repentance and remission of sins should be preached
in His name *among all nations*” (24:47)

“Ye shall be witnesses unto Me
both in Jerusalem (the starting point—24:47)
and in all Judea (the home of the Jews)
and in Samaria (the home of the Samaritans)
and unto the uttermost part of the earth (the home
of the Gentiles)” (Acts 1:8)

As recorded by John:

“[I have] sent them *into the world*” (17:18; cf. 20:21)

God’s chosen people were once numbered among *a nation*. To find God’s faithful remnant according to the election of grace, one would look *within* the nation Israel: “I have left me seven thousand *in Israel*, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal” (1 Kings 19:18). Today God’s chosen people are *among all nations* (cf. Luke 24:47), representing Christ throughout the world.

Who were these men who were given this worldwide commission? What were their credentials? Certainly they were not among the rulers of Israel. None of the eleven were members of the Sanhedrin. They were opposed by the Jewish religious leaders of their day. Who were these common, ordinary men? They were merely a band of “unlearned and ignorant men” (Acts 4:13), including several fishermen and a publican! They were *nobodies* telling *everybody* about *somebody* who could save *anybody*! They had a life-changing gospel which they were commanded to proclaim, not to the Jews only, but also to the Samaritans and the nations of the world.

Imagine the response of the unbelieving Jews as they witnessed the intense evangelistic activity of these early disciples. One can almost hear their objections:

“What right do you men have to preach a message of reconciliation to pagan Gentiles and mongrel Samari-

tans with whom we should have no dealings? How can you offer forgiveness to those outside of the commonwealth of Israel? Do you not know that God's witness on earth is the nation Israel, and that it is only through this nation that men can come to know the true and living God?

“Jerusalem is the holy city, and the Temple is where God manifests His presence. What right do you have to announce to the nations that they can get right with God *apart from circumcision* and *apart from Judaism*? Salvation is of the Jews. Why do you seek to drastically alter God's purpose and program which must have its center of operation in the chosen nation of Israel?”*

Surely our Lord was aware of these problems which would face His apostles, and He knew that these men lacked certain credentials. So not only did Christ give them a message to preach, but also He gave them a promise of *signs* which would serve to confirm and authenticate the gospel message:

And these signs shall follow those who believe. . . .
And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and *confirming the word with signs* following (Mark 16:17,20).

* It is noteworthy that in Acts 8 the Ethiopian eunuch came to Jerusalem seeking to worship, and to come to know the true and living God. Not until he left the city to return home did he hear the message of life. Jerusalem failed to give him what he had come to find.

One remarkable sign here predicted by the Lord Jesus was that the disciples would be given the ability to “speak with new tongues” (Mark 16:17). This is the first mention of the *gift* of tongues in the Bible—a promise given by the risen Lord and soon to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

A CONFIRMATORY SIGN

According to Mark 16:20, the purpose of these *sign-gifts* was to *confirm* (establish, strengthen) *the word* of the apostles (compare Hebrews 2:3-4). Consider, for example, the gift of healing. When the apostles went forth preaching, they announced to men everywhere that *forgiveness of sins* could be received by faith in Christ:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission [forgiveness] of sins (Acts 2:38).

Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out (Acts 3:19).

Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31).

To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive *remission* [forgiveness] of sins (Acts 10:43).

What right did these uneducated fishermen have to offer such forgiveness to men? How could they preach with such authority? Did this message really originate from God? Should a message coming from such common and ordinary men be believed?

In Acts 3 Peter and John met a certain man who was lame from his mother's womb. Imagine Peter challenging the crowd by saying:

Which is easier to say to this lame man, "Your sins are forgiven if you believe in Christ" or "Arise, get up and walk"?

Obviously, Peter's authority in the spiritual realm could not be visibly demonstrated. It is impossible to look within a man and see if his sins are actually forgiven. But in order to prove that his promise of forgiveness was valid, Peter performed a miracle in the physical realm which no one could deny (Acts 4:13-16). Thus Peter continues:

But that you may know that God has power to forgive sins in the name of Christ [he says to the lame man] in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk (compare Mark 2:5-12).

Thus God confirmed the word of His apostles, bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 2:4).

How then did the gift of tongues serve to confirm the word of the apostles? Perhaps this is best illustrated in the account of the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10). For the very first time the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles, a spiritual fact which the Jews found extremely difficult to believe. Would the God of Israel really accept Gentiles into His Church and give them all the spiritual benefits that saved Jews enjoyed?

Such a concept was utterly foreign to the Jewish mind! Peter (who had already heard the great commission and who was given the command to preach to *every* creature) had to be given the thrice-repeated visual object lesson of a supernatural trance before he finally got the message (Acts 10:9-18)! But Peter learned that God was able even to take an unclean Gentile and provide the needed cleansing through Christ (Acts 10:28).

Peter learned this lesson so well that his message to Cornelius and those Gentiles with him was saturated with universalism. It was a message which would have shocked contemporary Judaism! Notice Peter's emphasis:

God is no respecter of persons! Jew or Gentile—there is no difference (Acts 10:34; cf. Romans 3:22)!

God accepts people *in every nation* (Acts 10:35).

God is *Lord of all*! Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also (Acts 10:36; cf. Romans 3:29)!

Whoever believes in Christ (not just Jews but Gentiles also) shall receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43; cf. Romans 10:12-13)!

Thus a mere fisherman announced to these Gentiles that they could enjoy God's full salvation by faith in Christ alone, apart from circumcision and apart from becoming a Jewish proselyte! Imagine the Jewish reaction to such a message:

"Peter, for hundreds of years God's full blessings could come to a Gentile only through the nation Israel, God's witness on earth. What right do you have to receive Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews? If Israel is God's chosen nation, then how can God accept people in every nation? By what authority do you promote such a strange and novel doctrine? Is this teaching really of God?"

Once again God stood behind His servant Peter, and gave an authenticating sign to prove that these Gentiles had been accepted into the Church on an equal basis, and as fellow members of the same body (Ephesians 3:6). Although no one was healed, a remarkable miracle took place. These believing Gentiles began to speak with new tongues, a miraculous manifestation identical to what the Jews had experienced on the day of Pentecost. As a result, those Jews who were present with Peter were astonished that the Gentiles had also received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45-46).

Thus tongues was an outward evidence that these Gentiles had been fully received into the body of

Christ by means of Spirit-baptism (Acts 11:15-17). Indeed, these Gentiles were the recipients of every spiritual blessing in Christ. When the Jews heard of the repeated manifestation of this sign-gift, they could only conclude that "God hath also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). So the word of a Galilean fisherman was wonderfully confirmed by the living God.

A SUPERNATURAL GIFT

In Mark 16:17-18, the gift of tongues is classified with other gifts which were obviously supernatural. God-given power and authority is required in order to cast out demons and heal the sick (cf. Matthew 10:1). Miraculous protection is needed in order to be delivered from the effects of deadly venom and deadly poison. Tongues is here included in a list of miraculous, supernatural sign-gifts (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:9-10, 29-30). Therefore the ability to speak in a tongue was a supernatural, God-given ability (cf. Acts 2:4). Today, in contrast, "speaking in tongues" most often takes the form of "ecstatic utterances" which can readily be attained psychologically by a person who reaches a state of religious and emotional ecstasy.

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

When the Lord first mentioned the gift of tongues He described and defined the word "tongues" by the

adjective “new”: “they shall speak with *new* tongues” (Mark 16:17). The word “new” means “new, unknown, strange.”¹ Thus tongues is the supernatural (God-given) ability whereby a person is able to speak in a tongue that he has never spoken in before, one that is totally *new* to him. We would speak in similar terms today: “I’m going to school and learn a *new* language.” The language itself is not new, but it is new to the one who has never previously learned it.

The fulfillment of the Lord’s prediction that new tongues would be spoken took place only fifty days after the resurrection. It was then, on the day of Pentecost, that the Spirit of God was poured out upon those Jewish believers in a unique and wonderful way, and the Church of Jesus Christ was born.