

A More Covenantal Approach to Tongues at Pentecost

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Introduction

In this paper I want to provide arguments for an alternative view of Pentecost and the New Testament gift of tongues, a view that is not widely held in the Church today. Although not wanting to be dogmatic about it, since there are many more fine Bible scholars that hold opposing views, I believe this minority view is more closely tied to the Abrahamic covenant, and to the Bible as a whole, than the view held by the majority of Evangelicals today.¹ Indeed, the majority view seems almost completely out of context with the Bible and the entire Jewish experience. Taking a view contrary to the majority is always discomfoting, as it should be. We Reformed folk especially tremble when our views are contrary to John Calvin's! Nevertheless, FORC elders are quite aware that majority views in the Church are not always right (e.g. paedocommunion, the geocentric universe prior to the 1543 publication of Copernicus, papal authority prior to the reformation, etc.). Sometimes majority views are more the result of herd behavior and mob action rather than clear Biblical thinking. Indeed, assuming something is true simply because the majority believes it to be true is a logical fallacy. Sometimes the general theological position of the majority can be right, yet a clear Biblical understanding of why they are right can be muddled. A muddled understanding of the details can then lead to all kinds of errors and divisiveness on the general position. I believe this is the case with the issue of tongues and Pentecost. Modern views on the nature of tongues (in the details), even going back to Calvin,² have lead to the Pentecostal/charismatic movement.³ I believe this movement probably would not have occurred if a more clear Biblical and covenantal understanding of the nature of tongues had been widely held. At least the current confusion over tongues would not be an issue. (I say this as one who personally spent 27 years in the charismatic movement as a "tongues-speaker.") It should be noted that there is no historical evidence that the second century Montanists, who have sometimes been called "the early charismatics," ever spoke in "charismatic tongues" or unintelligible languages. The issue with regard to the Montanists was the so-called "new prophecy."

Let me state up front that I fully subscribe to the cessation of revelational gifts, as held by the majority of reformed Christians today, and as stated in the very first para-

¹ The majority of Christians today hold that tongues in Acts 2 is xenoglossy, a phenomenon where a person miraculously speaks in a language he did not previously know.

² Commentary Upon The Acts Of The Apostles, by John Calvin, Chap 2, vs 11, "...first, because the apostles being before ignorant...The other is, because they have new tongues given them suddenly."

³ Although Pentecostals and charismatics sometimes make a distinction between themselves, the distinctions are really not all that significant with regard to the subject discussed here. In this paper I use "Pentecostal" and "Charismatic" interchangeably.

graph of the **Westminster Confession of Faith**: "...which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased." I believe that Biblical tongues is among the revelational gifts that have now ceased. O. Palmer Robertson provides an excellent defense of this position in his book, **The Final Word**.⁴ As Dr. Robertson demonstrates, the revelational gifts are intimately tied to the finished work of Christ. Christ gave the ultimate and final revelation of the Father and completed the scriptures through His personally appointed apostles. All the scriptures were completed by 70 AD, at which point revelational gifts ceased. To hold that revelational gifts have not ceased is to maintain that the scriptures are not yet complete and that Christ's work 2000 years ago was insufficient. Not surprisingly, Mormons, who also speak in tongues today, claim their modern prophet Joseph Smith gave a more complete revelation of Christ! Hebrews 1:1-2 clearly states that Jesus Christ is the ultimate and final Prophet. He was the great Prophet predicted by Moses in Deut 18:15-19 and affirmed by the voice of God in Matt 17:5. Practically all Reformed Christians today maintain the sufficiency of Christ's work, the completion of scriptures, and the cessation of revelational gifts, and this is not questioned in this paper.

What is questioned here is the exact nature of the miracle of tongues in Acts 2 and elsewhere in the New Testament. The traditional majority view holds that the Acts 2 tongues is a miraculous speaking of a language that the disciples had not previously learned, sometimes called xenoglossy. Proponents of this view often appeal to the tower of Babel event in Gen 11 for Old Testament support (which to me seems a bit of a stretch)⁵ or to the need for a language miracle in order to assist rapid evangelism (in spite of the fact that all the Jews spoke a common understandable language in Jerusalem that day as evidenced by Peter's defense using a single language). The view argued for here generally follows along the lines of the view argued for by Robert Zerhusen, with some slight modifications. Modifications include retaining the miraculous nature of tongues at Pentecost (in the way that all prophecy and revelation from God is miraculous) and demonstrating the core significance of the Acts 2 event to Jews steeped in the Old Testament scriptures. The reader not familiar with Robert Zerhusen's work can find his three papers on the internet with a simple search on his name. Zerhusen's three papers include: Detective Columbo as Theologian, A New Look at Tongues, and The Problem of Tongues in 1 Corinthians 14.⁶

Zerhusen very effectively argues that the disciples did in fact know the languages they spoke in "tongues" on Pentecost. They spoke in Gentile tongues that both they and their Jewish listeners knew and understood. No one attributes "drunkenness" (Acts 2:13-15) to someone who miraculously speaks in a language he did not previously know. But people do attribute drunkenness to blatant violations of cultural standards and tradi-

⁴ **The Final Word**, O. Palmer Robertson, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993.

⁵ What God did in Gen 11 is a completely different phenomenon for completely different reasons.

⁶ All three articles are currently located at: http://www.forananswer.org/Top_General/Zerhusen.htm

tions. Jesus violated cultural traditions by healing on the Sabbath and was accused of having a demon. Likewise the disciples violated a cultural tradition of the Jewish diglossia⁷ in the temple area on a high holy day of the Jewish church and were accused of drunkenness. Similar to the diglossia that exists in Roman Catholic high church today, the Jews in Acts 2 practiced a diglossia that was even more essential under Roman domination for maintaining their identity.

Indeed, language is the primary distinctive of a cultural identity. Hebrew was the holy mother tongue of Jews. The original language of the scriptures given by God was primarily in Hebrew. The covenant people of God from Abraham on were called “Hebrews” (Gen 14:13). Although the Greek Septuagint was available to teach proselytes God’s revelation, the good faithful Jew learned Hebrew, the holy mother tongue of the people of God. Ethnic groups today that feel they are being absorbed into foreign cultures often try to either invent a unique way of speaking or revert back to an original language unique to their own culture. For Jews wanting to maintain cultural identity under Roman domination the practice of a diglossia in the temple area on high holy feast days was essential, and a violation of it was next to sacrilege. Yet, as I hope to demonstrate in this paper, the disciples’ violation of this cultural idolatry⁸ was at the very heart of the gospel of Christ.

Pentecost set the stage for the theme that runs through the rest of Luke’s book of Acts, that Gentiles were now being included among the covenant people of God. The apostle Paul constantly battled the Judaizers who demanded that Christians must also become Jews in order to be included among the people of God. Paul clearly argues that the culture of Christ and the true covenant people of God goes far beyond Hebrew culture (e.g. Gal 2 and 3). The covenant people of God includes all cultural identities on earth, as long as those cultures do not violate Christ’s commandments (Matt 28:19,20). As Rom 10:12 says, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.”⁹

Problems with the Majority Xenoglossy View

The primary problem with the majority view of tongues in Acts 2 being languages that the disciples did not previously know (xenoglossy) is its lack

⁷ In this paper I use the narrower definition of diglossia, as Zerhusen uses it, probably better referred to as ecclesiastical diglossia, to mean the use of one language for religious worship and liturgy and the use of other languages for normal everyday conversation. For example, high church Roman Catholics use Latin in their liturgy today.

⁸ Luke shows how strong this cultural idolatry was among the Jewish mob in Acts 22:2 by pointing out the mob became all the more silent when Paul spoke to them in Hebrew. Apparently they were more willing to listen to one from their own cultural identity.

⁹ In this paper all quotes of scripture are from the New King James version of the Bible.

of Biblical and historical support. Nowhere does Acts 2 imply the disciples did not previously know the languages they spoke. This view is based on reading into Acts 2:7,8 (“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?”) an interpretation that says, “These men are ignorant Galileans who can’t possibly know the languages they are speaking.” But that is not what the scripture says. A more context-compatible interpretation of what Luke is saying here would be, “These men are Galilean Jews living right next door to the temple and should know better than to prophesy in Gentile tongues, rather than in the holy mother tongue of Hebrew!” The list in Acts 2:9-11 is not a list of different languages, but a list of geographical regions (primarily Gentile) to which the Jews had been scattered. History shows that these regions spoke either Aramaic, Greek, or Latin, languages which the disciples most likely knew quite well. These are the languages of the great empires that God showed Daniel leading up to the time of the Messiah. Certainly the Jews (as well as other surrounding nations) would have learned the language of their conquerors; Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, and now Romans. Most people spoke several languages back then. It is unreasonable to expect that the crowd would know which languages the disciples did or did not know, and then to judge them as being drunk because they miraculously spoke in a language they did not previously know!

There is nothing either historically or biblically to indicate that Galileans were ignorant uneducated people. This is an assumption that moderns read into Acts 2 today.

History indicates Galileans were fiercely loyal to Judaism, even to the point of rebellion to Rome. They were zealous for the fundamentals of the Jewish faith, but not so zealous for the rules and regulations of the extra-biblical Talmud. Thus the Pharisees often looked down on Galileans. Galileans would be the modern-day equivalent of what we call “Bible-believing fundamentalists.” The Galileans present that day on Pentecost were no doubt Jews, otherwise they wouldn’t be there that day! But they were a particular kind of Jew, a Jewish fundamentalist that tends to produce zealots. So when we read in Acts 2:7, “Look are not all these who speak, Galileans?” we should read this question in the context of Galileans being fundamentalists rather than uneducated folk. Peter does not defend the disciples’ actions by saying, “You just witnessed a language miracle whereby these men spoke in languages they did not previously know,” which is the kind of defense we would normally expect with the strange phenomenon of xenoglossy. Rather, Peter immediately appeals to Joel 2 where God says, “I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” Twice Peter calls the phenomenon prophecy, in verse 17 and again in verse 18. Three times he implies the inclusion of Gentiles among the people of God, first by the reference to “all flesh” in verse 17, then by “whoever calls on the name of the Lord” in verse 21, and then by “to all who are afar off” in verse 39. If Peter calls the phenomenon prophecy or revelation by dreams and visions then we should take him at his word and not try to make it into some kind of weird “speaking a language previously unknown to the speaker.” Prophets prophesy in languages they already know, not in unknown languages. So in the context of the rest of scripture, it is not necessary that Acts 2 be a xenoglossy miracle,

cle, but rather a miracle of prophesy in known non-Hebrew languages. Xenoglossy does not drive home the point of inclusion of Gentiles any more than normal prophesy.

Rather it confuses the issue and leads to further problems, such as the modern charismatic movement. Again, nothing in history or scripture says the disciples did not know the languages they spoke that day on Pentecost. This is simply an assumption made by modern theologians.

Jews understood what prophecy looked like; it was a familiar miraculous phenomenon in their entire religious culture. Indeed, all their scriptures were given by prophecy (2 Pe 1:19-21). But a phenomenon of speaking in a language not previously learned would have been totally foreign to all their religious experience, and we would not have expected Peter to make the kind of defense that he did. The “pouring out of the Spirit” was a concept quite familiar to the Jew learned in the scriptures. When Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to be poured out on them they would not be wondering about what kind of weird miracle might happen to them! No doubt they would be thinking of the numerous Old Testament references to the Spirit being poured out. Rather than trying to understand the Acts 2 event in light of modern experience and appealing only to the New Testament, we need to determine what the event meant to Luke and to the Jewish audience present that day, all of whom were steeped in the Old Testament scriptures. The Old Testament context should be our primary means of interpreting the events in Acts 2. We’ll say more on this later in this paper.

Another problem with the current majority view of tongues is that it forces a significant distinction between the tongues in Acts 2 and the tongues in 1 Cor 14. Even Pentecostals, who hold to the xenoglossy view of tongues, must make a distinction between the two different kinds of tongues. In Acts 2 the audience clearly understood the languages being spoken by the disciples since “everyone heard them speak in his own language,” a language in which they were born (vs 6-8). But the tongues in 1 Cor 14 is not understood by the entire congregation, which is why Paul argues that tongues is inferior to prophecy, unless the gift of interpretation is also given.

Pentecostals also maintain, via a misinterpretation of 1 Cor 14:14, that the tongues speaker also does not understand his own words spoken in tongues. They do this by holding to a strong trichotomist¹⁰ view of man (spirit, soul, and body) where the “spirit” prays but the “soul” or mind doesn’t understand what the spirit is praying. But Paul clearly argues in 1 Cor 14 that understanding is necessary for edification. He also states in 1 Cor 14:4 that the tongues-speaker is edified, which implies he understands his own words. When Paul states in verse 14 that “my understanding is unfruitful” he is not saying “my understanding is without understanding.” Rather, he is saying, “my own understanding is not bearing fruit (or

¹⁰ Louis Berkhof effectively argues that trichotomy is unBiblical in his book, **Systematic Theology**, under the section entitled, “The Constitutional Nature of Man.” Dichotomy is more widely held among Reformed Christians.

edification) in the congregation.” The entire context of 1 Cor 14 shows that Paul views tongues as unfruitful unless the whole congregation is edified.¹¹ Likewise, when Paul speaks of singing and praying with the spirit and with the understanding in verse 15, he is talking about the understanding of the congregation, not the understanding of the speaker, as verse 16 makes clear.

As a result of the xenoglossy view, Pentecostals claim that the tongues in Acts 2 is a real language understood at least by the hearers, and maybe by the speakers. But the tongues in 1 Cor 14 is a language understood by nobody but God. It’s a heavenly language, possibly the language of angels, but not a known human language. On the other hand, a view that sees the tongues in Acts 2 as prophecy in Gentile languages, known at least to the speaker, removes practically all distinctions between the tongues in Acts 2 and 1 Cor 12 and 14. Paul closely ties tongues to prophecy in 1 Cor 14, stating in verse 5 that the latter is greater unless the tongues-speaker also interprets. In other words, tongues + interpretation = prophecy. In both Acts 2 and 1 Cor 14 tongues is prophecy in a language other than the common language of the congregation. In Acts 2, where the common language was Hebrew, “tongues” meant prophecy in Gentile languages. By the time 1 Cor 14 was written the Church had become accustomed to prophecy in Greek and less influenced by Jewish culture. In the multicultural center of Corinth it would not be surprising for Paul to generalize the definition of (a.) “tongues” to mean prophecy understood only by the speaker or a small minority of the congregation and (b.) “prophecy” to mean prophecy in a language common to everyone in the congregation.

The question naturally arises with this alternative view of tongues, “If the tongues-speaker understood his own words, why would he also need a gift of interpretation of tongues?” The answer to this is quite simple. How many people could hear an entire Psalm read in the congregation today and then recite it back accurately word for word from memory (without having previously memorized it) in the same language it was read, without translating it? Now add on top of that the task of an accurate translation into another language. We all know the difficulty of translating the scriptures into other languages. The task requires large committees of translators, who know both the original and the target languages, who engage in lengthy discussions over the proper selection of translated words. Even at that, practically all Reformed elders under examination when asked the question, “Are the scriptures inerrant?” will respond with, “They are inerrant in the original languages in which they were given.” To translate an inerrant prophecy inerrantly into another language requires a supernatural revelational gift of the Spirit, called “interpretation of tongues.”

Along with Paul, Luke also holds a close connection between tongues and prophecy. When Luke says in Acts 19:6, “they spoke with tongues and

¹¹ It is noted that some of the Reformers used this very argument against the Roman Catholic practice of conducting the liturgy in Latin.

prophesied,” he is not mentioning two distinctly different gifts of the Spirit, but rather stating that they not only prophesied in the Jewish sense of true revelatory words from God, but they prophesied in Gentile languages. Luke shows in Acts 10:44-48 how tongues were used as a sign to Jews that still had trouble believing that Gentiles were completely accepted by God among His covenant people. This is consistent with Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 14:22 that tongues are a sign to unbelievers. Those who hold the xenoglossy view of tongues usually have to resort to modern “urban legends” to explain what Paul means here.

Xenoglossy also causes inconsistencies within the book of Acts itself. Luke says that the tongues of Acts 10:44-48 are identical to the tongues in Acts 2 because the Gentiles “received the Holy Spirit just as we have,” and that this event astonished those of the circumcision, just as it did in Acts 2. To maintain that the tongues in Acts 2 is xenoglossy requires one to also admit that the tongues in Acts 10 is also xenoglossy. Yet there is nothing in this passage that even remotely supports xenoglossy. Peter would not have known which languages the Gentiles did or did not naturally speak and that question is not even raised. What is clear is that Peter recognized that the Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles as evidenced by their speaking (or prophesying) in tongues. Peter understood what they spoke and they obviously understood Peter’s preaching. A weird xenoglossy miracle is not needed nor called for here. But if the evidence of the Spirit’s outpouring was simply that they prophesied in Gentile tongues it would fully explain Peter’s response and the astonishment of the Jews. Unlike us living 2000 years later after prophecy has ceased, the Jews knew what real prophecy looked like. Indeed, they had to know because their law required them to judge between true and false prophecy (Deut 13:1-5). That requirement of course ended in 70 AD when the Temple was destroyed and the Scriptures were completed. (See also Rom 3:1,2.)

The Jewish Understanding of Spirit and Prophecy

Luke quotes Jesus at the end of his gospel as saying, “I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endowed with power from on high.” Luke repeats Jesus’ command in Acts 1:4-8, adding the phrase, “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Luke further defines this in verse 8 with, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” The outpouring of the Spirit upon men and receiving of power was a very familiar concept to the Jewish mind, especially on Pentecost. Jews celebrated Pentecost to commemorate the prophet Moses giving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, a supernatural revelation from God, given in a language that both the prophet and congregation understood. Luke records Peter’s defense of the tongues event where he quotes the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. Peter calls it “prophecy,” which is supernatural revelation from God akin to what Moses received. As Mt. Si-

nai was the beginning of Moses teaching the old covenant, so the Acts 2 Pentecost was the beginning of the Apostolic teaching of the new covenant. The “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3) reminds us of the Lord descending on Mt Sinai in fire (Ex 19:18). Acts 2 is tied right directly to Exodus 20. To understand how the Spirit-induced tongues in the book of Acts is not some unique strange phenomenon completely detached from Biblical history, but rather it was intimately tied to all of Jewish experience and future expectations, we turn to the Old Testament scriptures. We ask, “In light of the scriptures from Genesis to Malachi, what did the outpouring of the Spirit mean to Luke and the Jews? How did those Jews understand the Holy Spirit to operate? What phenomenon did the Spirit normally produce in His people?” In the following paragraph we list the primary Old Testament passages dealing with the Spirit and His operation in God’s people, along with a brief summary of the passage. The reader is encouraged to look these scriptures up and read them in context.

Gen 41:38-39; Pharaoh recognized that the Spirit of God was upon Joseph to wisely lead His nation through the coming famine. Joseph prophetically interpreted Pharaoh’s dream. Ex 31:3-6 and 35:30-36:2; The Spirit of God gifted the artisan Bezaleel to correctly fabricate the holy articles of the Tabernacle, with wisdom and understanding inspired by the Holy Spirit. Num 11:25-29; The seventy elders prophesy when the Spirit comes upon them. This passage is particularly interesting for the fact that two men, Eldad and Medad, who remained in the camp, also prophesied as a result of the Spirit. Joshua thinks Moses should forbid them to prophesy because they were not among the seventy. But Moses says, as if pointing forward to Acts 2, “Oh, that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!” Num 24:2; The Spirit of God comes upon Balaam to prophesy good upon Israel. Num 27:18 and Deut 34:9; The Spirit is upon Joshua to be Moses’ successor to lead Israel. Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 14:6,19, 15:14, and 1 Sam 11:6, 16:13,14; The Spirit of the Lord empowers men to judge, lead, and defend the people of God. 1 Sam 10:6,10, 19:20-24; The Spirit comes upon Saul and his messengers and they prophesy. Ps 51:11,12; David recognizes the Spirit is with him and in 2 Sam 23:1,2 he recognizes that the Spirit empowered him to prophesy. 1 Kings 18:12; The Spirit of the Lord directed the prophets. 1 Chron 28:11-12; The Spirit revealed to David the plans of the Temple. 2 Chron 15:1-8; The Spirit gives bold speech and prophecy. 2 Chron 20:14-19; The Spirit encourages kings and congregations through prophecy. 2 Chron 24:20; The Spirit of God comes upon Zechariah and he prophesies. Neh 9:30 explicitly says the Spirit spoke through God’s prophets. Is 11:1,2 says the Spirit will rest upon the Messiah in wisdom, counsel, and knowledge. Is 32:15 speaks of the Spirit poured out from on high on God’s people, with the result that the wilderness becomes a fruitful field. Is 42:1-13 is a key passage that shows the Spirit empowers the Messiah to bring light to the Gentiles. Is 44:3 speaks of the Spirit being poured out on Jacob’s descendants for blessing. Is 48:16-17; The Spirit

speaks through the prophets. Is 59:21; The Spirit puts God's words in His people's mouths. Is 61:1-11 is another key passage, quoted by Jesus, declaring that the Spirit of the Lord empowers the Messiah to cause righteousness to spring forth before all the nations. Is 63:11-12 says the Holy Spirit worked through Moses. Ezekiel declares in Eze 2:2, 3:12,24, 8:3, 11:1,5,24, 43:5 that the Spirit spoke to him and gave him visions. Eze 36:27; The Spirit empowers God's people to live righteously. Eze 37:11-14; The Spirit will bring about the resurrection. God explicitly states in Eze 39:29 that He will pour out His Spirit on the house of Israel. Joel 2:28,29 uses similar language and adds that it will be upon "all flesh" and result in prophecies, dreams, and visions. Micah says in Mic 3:8 that the Spirit empowers him to prophesy. Zech 7:12 states that the Spirit gives God's law and words through the prophets. Mal 2:15 shows the Spirit empowers godly marriages and godly offspring.

The above scriptures show that the overwhelming evidence of the outpouring of the Spirit upon God's people is prophecy and understandable revelation from God. Prophecy is the normal phenomenon that occurs in the Old Testament. Prophecy does not necessarily indicate a godly life, as in the examples of Saul and Balaam. The Spirit also gives supernatural wisdom, supernatural craftsmanship, leadership capability, boldness, strength, and the ability to be godly spouses and parents. All of these things the Jews in Acts 2 were quite familiar with from their studies of the scriptures and their own history. When Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to be poured out on them, they would have expected to prophesy with boldness like the prophets before them did. They may or may not have expected to prophesy in Gentile tongues. But nothing in their history would tell them that they would speak in a language they had not previously learned.

There is not one shred of evidence in all of Biblical history of a miracle of xenoglossy on God's people as modern theologians commonly believe to have occurred in Acts 2.¹² Theologians admit the miracle of xenoglossy is unique to Acts 2. Such a miracle would have been so foreign to all of Jewish experience that we would expect Luke to go into great detail explaining this miracle and why it was from God. At the very least he would have appealed to Gen 11 in some strange way and proved that Acts 2 was an inverted Tower of Babel experience. The fact that Luke does not do this is evidence that Acts 2 was the familiar and recognizable phenomenon of prophecy that occurred when the Spirit was poured out on God's covenant people. The only new twist was that this prophecy was happening in Gentile tongues rather than the Hebrew tongue. Although

¹² Wikipedia defines xenoglossy as the putative paranormal phenomenon in which a person is able to speak a language that he or she could not have acquired by natural means. Practically all scientific investigations into modern reported cases of xenoglossy have cast doubt on their validity. Wikipedia further states that, "The New Testament claims that xenoglossy took place at Pentecost." Therefore, Christians claim a phenomenon in Acts 2 that has occurred nowhere else in scripture and has most likely never occurred since in history!

some mocked the disciples of being drunk that day, others were amazed and perplexed and wondered, “Whatever could this mean?” They well could have remembered Isaiah’s prophecy in Is 28:11,12; “For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, to whom He said, this is the rest with which you may cause the weary to rest, and, this is the refreshing; yet they would not hear.” Their question would have been natural. If some were wondering if this was a sign of judgement along the lines of Deut 28:49 and Is 33:19, their question, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?” would have been quite understandable. In the next section we’ll see another way that this question by the crowds makes perfect sense without resorting to a weird xenoglossy miracle.

The Jewish Future Expectations Concerning the Gentiles

A constant theme running throughout all the scriptures from Genesis to Malachi was that Israel would be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. The Jews looked forward to the day when the Messiah-King, the son of David, would come and cause all the nations to worship the true God in Jerusalem. This theme is especially prevalent in the Psalms and in the book of Isaiah. What surprised the Jews was how God brought all this about through Christ Jesus. We review some of these scriptures here to show how pervasive this theme was. No doubt, this theme was most likely on the minds of the Jews at Pentecost when they heard prophecy in Gentile tongues.

God covenanted with Abraham that he would be the father of many nations (Gen 17:4-16). God Himself declares what He means by this covenant in Gen 18:18, “And all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him,” and in Gen 22:18, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,” and again in Gen 26:4, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” (See also Gen 12:3, 28:14) God’s covenant with Abraham was specifically to bring heavenly glory and righteousness to all the nations of earth. David sings of this expectation in 1 Chron 16:31, “Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad; and let them say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns.’ “

David speaks of this theme in numerous places in the Psalms. A few of these include: Ps 22:27,28, “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord’s, and He rules over the nations.” Ps 57:9, “I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations.” Ps 67:4, “Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations on earth.” Ps 72:11,17,19, “Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him. ... All nations shall call Him blessed. ...And let the whole earth be filled with His glory.” Ps 82:8, “Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations.” Ps 86:9, “All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, and shall glorify

Your name.” Ps 108:3, “I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples, and I will sing praises to You among the nations.” Ps 117:1, “Oh, praise the Lord, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!”

The prophet Isaiah similarly picks up this theme. A few of these scriptures include: Is 2:2-4, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” Is 11:10, “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; for the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.” Is 11:12, “He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.” (Note similarities with Matt 24:31.) Is 42:1-13, “Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. ...And the coastlands shall wait for His law. ...I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. ...Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare His praise in the coastlands. The Lord shall go forth like a mighty man.” Is 49:6,22, “Indeed He says, It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth. ...Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples; they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.” Is 52:10-15, “The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. ...Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high, just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; so shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.” Is 55:5, “Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you.” Is 60:1-3, “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you. The Gen-

tiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” Is 61:11, “For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.” Is 62:2, “The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name.” Is 66:18-24, “For I know their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see My glory. I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations; to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. Then they shall bring all your brethren for an offering to the Lord out of all nations, on horses and in chariots and in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. And I will also take some of them for priests and Levites, says the Lord. For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, says the Lord, so shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord. And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”

The prophet Jeremiah also speaks of this same theme: Jer 3:17, “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; they shall walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.” Jer 4:2, “And you shall swear, The Lord lives, in truth, in judgement, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory.” Jer 16:19-21, “O Lord, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come to You from the ends of the earth and say, ‘Surely our fathers have inherited lies, worthlessness and unprofitable things.’ Will a man make gods for himself, which are not gods? Therefore behold, I will this once cause them to know My hand and My might; and they shall know that My name is the Lord.”

The prophet Ezekiel also speaks of this same theme: Eze 36:24, “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.” Eze 37:21, “Thus says the Lord God: Surely I will take the children of Israel

from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land.” Eze 37:24-28, “David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgements and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children’s children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.” Eze 38:23, “Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.” Eze 39:26-29, “When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their own land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord God.”

Similarly, the other prophets speak of this same theme: Dan 7:14,27, “Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. ... Then the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.” Mic 4:1-3, “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” Zech 2:10-11, “Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst, says the Lord. Many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent Me to you.” Zech 8:22,23, “Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus says the Lord of

hosts: In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you for we have heard that God is with you.' " Mal 1:11, "For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts." Mal 3:12, "And all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land, says the Lord of hosts."

As extensive as the above list is, it is nowhere complete. Many more scriptures could be listed, but this shows the overwhelming teaching of scripture, from beginning to end, of God's intentions to engraft the Gentiles into the covenant people of God. The Jews in Acts 2 knew this and expected it, because that is what their scriptures taught them. The Jews understood that they were a special people: Deut 14:2, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." (See also Deut 26:19) But choosing Israel was not because God had abandoned the rest of His creation. Rather, His purpose in choosing Israel was to spread His glory throughout the rest of His creation. This meant Israel was to subdue the nations and bring them into obedience to God (Ps 47:2,3). But first Israel had to be subdued by God, gathered together out of all the nations where they had been scattered, and His Spirit poured out upon them so that His laws were written on their hearts. Then all the nations and every tongue would come streaming into Jerusalem¹³ to worship the living God. And somehow, the Messiah, the Spirit-anointed son of David, would accomplish all this. That was the expectation of the Jews on the day of Pentecost, as all their scriptures and prophets so loudly proclaimed.

So when the Jews heard prophecy in Gentile languages that day, and remembered all the prophetic scriptures about Gentiles flowing into Jerusalem, they naturally asked, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?" It was as if to say, "What's going on? All these men are Jews, not Gentiles! Besides, this is not supposed to happen until the Messiah comes." Peter then stood up and declared the event was in fact the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, of the predicted outpouring of His Spirit upon His people, and that the Messiah had in fact come, and that His name was Jesus! In a recent sermon,¹⁴ Stewart Jordan pointed out the connection between Is 52:15 and Acts 8:36. The Ethiopian (Gentile) eunuch was reading Isaiah 53, one of the most powerful Old Testament scriptures that shaped the early Church's understanding of Jesus Christ. This Gentile did not understand what he was reading and God had Philip explain it to him. In-

¹³ The New Testament teaches us that this is the heavenly Jerusalem. See Gal 4:26, Heb 12:22, Rev 3:12, Rev 21:2,10. The natural Jerusalem died in 70 AD and was resurrected into the heavenly Jerusalem in Christ, and ruled by Christ on David's throne at the right hand of God.

¹⁴ Sermon preached by Stewart Jordan at Redeemer Presbyterian Church on September 6, 2009.

cluded in the Suffering Servant passage of Is 53 is what we today number as Is 52:15, "So shall He sprinkle many nations." This passage was obviously included in what the eunuch was reading and what Philip explained, as evidenced by the fact that when the eunuch saw water he asked Philip, "What hinders me from being baptized?" This Gentile now understood from reading Isaiah and Philip's explanation that he was to be included in the covenant people of God in the same way the Jews in Ex 24:8 were included; by God's sprinkling, claiming, and cleansing from above (see also Eze 36:25). Luke's highlighting this story of the eunuch with miracles from God, both before and after the story, emphasizes the importance of this event in the overall story that Luke is trying to communicate. As testified by miracles from God, God was now fulfilling what He spoke by the Old Testament prophets, to sprinkle the Gentiles and fully include them among the covenant people of God.

The Jews expected Gentiles of every tongue to flow into Israel and glorify God, but they didn't expect them to be brought in the way Christ brought them in. They also didn't expect their Messiah to suffer on the cross. The remnant who did accept the death and resurrection of Christ still had difficulty accepting God's means for Gentiles becoming Jews. The book of Acts documents many of these difficulties. In Acts 10 Peter, even after defending the event in Acts 2, had to be told three times in a vision of unclean animals, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat!" It took this vision to convince Peter to eat with the Gentile Cornelius as a brother in Christ. But apparently Peter also had to see the Spirit poured out on Cornelius and the other Gentiles, as evidenced by prophecy, before He could baptize them. But even with all that, Paul had to publicly confront Peter and other Jews at one point for not eating with Gentile Christian brethren (Gal 2:11-16). Acts 13:42-50 shows how the Jews became filled with envy when they saw the multitudes of Gentiles converting to Christ and worshipping God. Acts 15 records the debate at the Jerusalem council dealing with the question of whether or not to require Gentile converts to be circumcised and made fully Jewish by obeying the law of Moses. James quotes Amos 9 to demonstrate God's plan to purify the hearts of Gentiles through faith in Christ. But unbelieving Jews continue to hound Paul all through the book of Acts, even trying to kill him (Acts 21:31). Acts 22 shows how intense this envy over Gentiles converting to God was among the Jews. As Paul speaks to the Jewish mob in Hebrew¹⁵ they silently listen as he describes his visions of Jesus, his healing from blindness, his baptism, how God spoke to him, up to the point that God said, "Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles." At that point the mob becomes angry and demands his execution. It becomes obvious that a constant theme

¹⁵ Some scholars believe that Paul did not speak to the people in Hebrew (Ἑβραϊδὶ) as stated in Acts 21:40 and 22:2 (same Greek word in Acts 26:14), but rather in Aramaic. But this creates a problem of defending the inerrancy of scripture. Both Hebrew and Aramaic were commonly spoken by Jews. Aramaic represented the hated language of Babylonian slavery. Hebrew was the Leshon HaKodesh, "the Holy Tongue."

running through the book of Acts is the Jewish struggle to receive Gentiles as full members of the covenant people of God, in spite of all their prophetic scriptures declaring that this would occur. It seems reasonable that Luke would open his book with a miraculous event, the outpouring of the Spirit, that directly ties into this struggle. What better way to introduce this struggle than to show Jews mocking the disciples (and the Spirit) for prophesying in Gentile tongues!

Conclusions

We have shown there is an abundance of Old Testament scriptures to fully explain what happened at Pentecost in Acts 2, without reverting to some kind of weird xenoglossy phenomenon completely detached from scripture and history. All of Old Testament scripture shows that the most common sign of the outpouring of the Spirit was prophecy. Peter calls the phenomenon “prophecy”; we should take him at his word. Peter also directly ties it into Joel’s prophecy, one of numerous scriptures predicting the outpouring of the Spirit and engrafting of the Gentiles into the covenant people of God. A Hebrew diglossia, similar to the Latin diglossia in Roman Catholic high church today, most naturally explains the reactions of the Jewish listeners that day and is fully consistent with the Jewish envy over Gentile Christian converts that runs throughout the New Testament. The Jews expected God to bring in the Gentiles, as evidenced by numerous Old Testament prophecies. Yet when it happened they struggled with it, as if God didn’t do it the way they wanted it to happen. Luke details this struggle throughout the book of Acts and it seems reasonable that he would open his book with an event directly tied into this struggle. The majority xenoglossy view makes Pentecost completely detached from the rest of the book of Acts and strains to show the phenomenon’s necessity for evangelism. Viewing the phenomenon as prophecy in Gentile tongues makes Acts 2 exceedingly significant to rest of the book of Acts. Acts 2 becomes the landmark event that introduces all the Jew-Gentile struggles that Luke records in the rest of the book. Previous to Acts 2, Pentecost tied the Jew to the law of Moses, the great prophet. The Pentecost of Acts 2 ties the Christian (Jew-plus-Gentile) to the law of Christ, the greater Prophet.

The majority xenoglossy view forces a distinction between the tongues in Acts 2 and the tongues in 1 Cor 14. It also produces inconsistencies within the book of Acts itself. This distinction is usually made in terms of xenoglossy (Acts 2) and glossolalia (1 Cor 14), at least by Pentecostals. A view that sees the tongues in Acts 2 as prophecy in Gentile tongues completely removes these distinctions and inconsistencies. Both the tongues in Acts 2 and the tongues in 1 Cor 14 are prophecies in a language not common to the entire congregation. And both were signs to unbelieving Jews of God’s fulfillment of scripture to pour out His Spirit on all the nations through faith in Christ. The need for that sign ceased to ex-

ist after 70 AD when God destroyed the Temple, made obedience to the old covenant impossible (not that it was faithfully obeyed before!), and completed the scriptures and put an end to revelational gifts. Under this minority view, modern Pentecostal tongues becomes a phenomenon with absolutely zero Biblical support! But more importantly, this minority view makes Acts 2 completely relevant to and central to God's covenantal promises throughout all the Old Testament scriptures. Acts 2 is the miraculous voice from God that Gentile believers (and their children) are now fully included among the covenant people of God!