

## 1 CORINTHIANS 13:8 TEACHES THE ENDING OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES By Greg Lundstedt

Now to understand when tongues will cease one needs to understand its primary and clearly related biblical purpose as demonstrated in Scripture.

In 1 Corinthians 14:20-22, the apostle Paul clearly relays the primary purpose of tongues and thus exhorts these Corinthians not to be ignorant or immature or babes in their thinking but to be mature and understand the real purpose of tongues: *1Co 14:20-22* <sup>20</sup> *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.* <sup>21</sup> *In the Law it is written, "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me," says the Lord.* <sup>22</sup> *So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe.*

Also, we must note the sign is not specifically 'the Gentiles salvation' although there is a relation as we will see. The sign was specifically 'being spoken to by men of strange tongues.' And this sign by God was to the unbelieving Jews ie "this people." This was just as it was back in Isaiah's day. (To be further explained). And specifically, sign pointed to the fact that the current generation of Jews were about to enter into judgment, i.e. they were cursed, just like the Jews of Isaiah day.

A clear straightforward reading of first Corinthians 14:20-22 reveals there is no other way to see it from this passage but as a sign "not to those who believe, but to unbelievers." This is backed up by his quote from Isaiah, which he uses as a premise for this conclusion. "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me," says the Lord. <sup>22</sup> So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers;

This sign is just for the unbelieving Jew THIS STATEMENT IS CRUCIAL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF TONGUES AND THUS UNDERSTANDING ANY OTHER PASSAGE CONCERNING TONGUES. <sup>22</sup> "So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers." If we don't understand this then we are immature in our thinking like the Corinthians were and we need to thus grow up and mature in our understanding of tongues.

**Let me explain the passage in light of its Old Testament context now:** *1Co 14:20-22* <sup>20</sup> *Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.* These Corinthians had been told already they were carnal or fleshy, had their wisdom revealed as foolishness and they were obviously immature, and clearly here their thinking concerning the gift of tongues revealed such fleshy, foolish immaturity. While they should have been naïve for immature towards evil, in contrast they should be mature in their thinking, in context concerning, tongues. So at this point Paul turns to Isaiah to prove his point.

Now important to realize that God had made it clear to Israel, that if they obeyed within the covenant they would be blessed and if they disobeyed they would be cursed (see Deuteronomy chapters 28-30) And God made it clear in advance in Deuteronomy 28 what the consequences of disobedience would be. Deuteronomy 28:47-50 *"Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; 48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD shall send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you. 49 "The*

*LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, 50 a nation of fierce countenance who shall have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.*

And we know clearly from Scripture and history, that God did bring about the exile of his people. The northern kingdom and 722 BC by the Assyrians, and the southern kingdom and 586 BC by the Babylonians.

And in Isaiah chapter 28, we have a warning to those in Judah concerning the imminent judgment because of their disobedience and this warning is in the context of the fact that men of strange tongues: *Isaiah 28:1-14 Woe to the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, And to the fading flower of its glorious beauty, Which is at the head of the fertile valley Of those who are overcome with wine! 2 Behold, the Lord has a strong and mighty agent; As a storm of hail, a tempest of destruction, Like a storm of mighty overflowing waters, He has cast it down to the earth with His hand. 3 The proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim is trodden under foot. 4 And the fading flower of its glorious beauty, Which is at the head of the fertile valley, Will be like the first-ripe fig prior to summer; Which one sees, And as soon as it is in his hand, He swallows it. 5 In that day the LORD of hosts will become a beautiful crown And a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people; 6 A spirit of justice for him who sits in judgment, A strength to those who repel the onslaught at the gate. 7 And these also reel with wine and stagger from strong drink: The priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, They are confused by wine, they stagger from strong drink; They reel while having visions, They totter when rendering judgment. 8 For all the tables are full of filthy vomit, without a single clean place. 9 "To whom would He teach knowledge? And to whom would He interpret the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just taken from the breast? 10 "For He says, 'Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there.'" 11 Indeed, He will speak to this people Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, 12 He who said to them, "Here is rest, give rest to the weary," And, "Here is repose," but they would not listen. 13 So the word of the LORD to them will be, "Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there," That they may go and stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive. 14 Therefore, hear the word of the LORD, O scoffers, Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem,*

And in our passage in first Corinthians the apostle Paul takes this quote inspired by the Holy Spirit and uses it to help us understand the purpose of tongues.

Indeed from Deuteronomy 28 and Isaiah 28, it's clear that God would bring those of a foreign tongue and this would signify their judgment as they are expelled by the from the land for their disobedience.

And Paul takes this concept from the Old Testament and applies it to the purpose of tongues. *21 In the Law it is written, "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me," says the Lord."* And then he draws his conclusion (so then) concerning tongues from his quote from Isaiah verse 22 *"So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe."*

It's important to note that the Greek word translated "so then" is *hoste*. It is an inferential conjunction that introduces an independent clause showing purpose. i.e. in light of this Old Testament Scriptural example, so then, the purpose of tongues is...

Folks Paul makes it absolutely clear that these Corinthians are not to be immature or even

evil in their thinking but that they are to understand the ultimate purpose of tongues which was assigned to those who do not believe. Now this doesn't negate or take away another purpose in which God used this sign which was to edify the church as we see when the gift of tongues was exercised properly and biblically and interpreted properly and biblically. But we must not misunderstand and be ignorant or evil in our thinking to think that this is the main purpose. It was a secondary purpose in which God used the gift to edify the body.

Let's not forget also in the Old Testament God did not use those foreign tongues to evangelize the unbelieving disobedient Jews, He did not use those foreign tongues to edify them. It was a sign of their imminent judgment because of their covenant unfaithfulness, and imminent judgment which would be concluded by their expulsion from the land.

Remember what we saw in Deuteronomy 28:49 "The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand,

And Paul in like fashion inspired by the Holy Spirit is applying this exact same Old Testament reality to the sign of tongues. 2 Corinthians 14:22 *"So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers"*

Just like the foreign tongues were a sign to unbelieving rebellious Israel and specifically Judah, so to these tongues were a sign in like manner to unbelieving Israel. "this people" who would be expelled because of their ultimate covenant unfaithfulness in crucifying Christ, so too would they be expelled. And is this not what happened in 70 A.D. where we had a replay of what happened to Israel in the Old Testament? Where the Temple was destroyed and the Jews were taken from the land. Indeed this happened when God's temporal discipline and punishment concerning the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem came to fruition on the current generation as recorded in history in 70 A.D. for rejecting in crucifying the Messiah as prophesied by our Lord in Luke 19:41-44, His parables in Matthew 21-22, and Matthew 24:2

Verse 22 *"So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers"*

God's plan of salvation had moved from the Jews to the Gentiles because of their disobedience in the context of His overall sovereignty Rom 11:7-12 *7 What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; 8 just as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day." 9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, And a stumbling block and a retribution to them. 10 "Let their eyes be darkened to see not, And bend their backs forever." 11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. 12 Now if their transgression be riches for the world and their failure be riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!*

So then biblically speaking God was at that time giving a sign to unbelieving Jews who had transgressed so greatly by crucifying the Lord of glory. And that sign was of their imminent judgment, like what was seen in the Old Testament, which would be their expulsion from the land, like what was seen in the Old Testament, and did happen in 70 A.D.

And just like in the Old Testament the sign having been fulfilled in the expulsion of the Jews from the land, so to in the New Testament the sign had been fulfilled in their expulsion from the land in 70 A.D, the sign was and is no longer needed, having been fulfilled.

Now is at this point the prophecy of the cessation of tongues in 1 Corinthians chapter 13:8 makes total sense.

Indeed 1 Corinthians 13:8 teaches simply and straightforwardly that current practice of that day in the Church of exercising the gifts of prophecy and knowledge will be “done away” (Greek- katargeo) and that the current practice of that day of tongues will “cease” (Greek- pauo). Paul writes “ *Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.*” 1 Corinthians 13:8

And here Paul uses the term “cease” rather than “done away” for tongues. This is an important distinction, because Paul goes on to speak of those things that will be “done away”, i.e. prophecy and knowledge as the “partial.’ These are the partial things that will be done away when the perfect comes . Therefore Paul is not associating tongues with the partial in his argument he is simply relating that they will cease.

Paul's exhortation for the Corinthians is to grow up and understand ultimately the reason for tongues. More specifically that there is sign for unbelieving Jews of their imminent impending judgment for their covenant unfaithfulness in rejecting the Messiah, and once that came forth the sign was no longer needed, and ceased to exist as prophesied. And as we said earlier in this paper this is certainly the reality which history affirms, biblical and secular.

One last quick point, one cannot miss the reality of this sign gift becoming less and less as time moves on in the book of Acts, and then altogether disappearing in the latter epistles and Revelation too.