

THE NATURE AND DURATION OF THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

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Introduction

The subject of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is one that has occupied this writer for the entire time of my salvation. It is recognized that first person writing is not normally acceptable in professional documents but much of reason for investigating this approach to the gifts comes from the personal journey of the writer of this article and therefore some liberties will be taken when it serves to move the story along.

As a young Christian I served in the United State Army in Augsburg, Germany. I participated in a local church off base made up of soldiers and pastored by a Worldwide European Ministries missionary (now it is called Biblical Ministries Worldwide). The pastor was J. Joseph Charles. Joe taught us as young believers a sound Historical-Grammatical Interpretative method of studying the Scripture and modeled that in his preaching. The vast majority of those who called themselves Christians in Augsburg were Charismatic of one degree or another and so the subject of the gifts of the Spirit was both a necessary one from a teaching standpoint and was a constant topic of conversation.

The traditional dispensational argument of partial Cessationism was clearly taught by Pastor Charles and embraced by this writer and those who were a part of our church body. In spite of all the great teaching and explanations it always puzzled me that the gifts we are talking about were given to the Church, and the church was still here yet the gifts for the church were

not and the explanations did not really explain why! Clearly some were connected to the Apostles as referenced in Hebrews 2:3-4, “³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴ God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.” (NASB) ¹

While it is clear to this writer that during the Apostolic Age the Apostles were empowered by the Holy Spirit with many of the same gifts mentioned in the gift lists that the Spirit gave to the church, the fact remained that He gave those gifts to the Church. I have worked with those who relegate all gifts to the apostolic era and argue that there are no gifts remaining only talents that are energized by the Holy Spirit. ² This position of full cessationism does not satisfy the evidence of the Spirit’s working in the Church so how were the gifts are to be understood and which are still here and which are absent has always been an issue for this writer. Now I know the arguments and can articulate them quite accurately but recent developments with the New Calvinists have placed the Sovereign Grace Ministries in the forefront of many conservative Christians and their view of full continuationism raises the issue again for this writer. The need to have a well-articulated defense for why some of the gifts appear to have ceased after the Apostolic Age is essential. This continues to be an issue in the geographic region in which this author teaches and occupies numerous conversations with students and pastors alike. There is a large Reformed Baptist Church in the area who is seeking to join Sovereign Grace Ministries and who’s senior pastor has taken an full-continuation

¹ The Lockman Foundation, *The New American Standard Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, Inc, 1960,1962,1963,1968,1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995).

² Conversation with W. M. (Skip) Forbes as we conversed regarding the duration of the gifts of the Spirit at an ETS conference In Nashville Tennessee, November 17-20, 2000.

position on the gifts. Presently many students attend this church and this raises issues in the classroom as a result of their teaching.

There seems to be some debate as to whether the miraculous signs and wonders that accompanied the Apostolic era continued after even to the fourth century and beyond.³ Gaffin suggests that the reports of miracles and other supernatural works of the Holy Spirit can be attributed to the “veneration of saints and martyrs, the traffic in relics, Christian magic, an expressive preoccupation with demonism, and miracle-mongering.”⁴ Certainly the activity no matter how accurately reported was severely limited in comparison to the apostolic era so as to be accurately characterized as non-normative. B.B. Warfield states, “had any miracles perchance occurred beyond the Apostolic age they would be without significance; mere occurrences with no universal meaning.”⁵

This writer is convinced that the Apostolic era contained a concentration of miraculous signs and wonders and agrees that Hebrews 2 focuses the purpose of those miraculous signs and wonders to the authentication of the Apostles message and the revelation that God desired to give to the new entity which we call the Church. While all of this is true there remains the difficulty of the list of gifts that Paul gives us in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians where a list of the signs and wonders are given to the Church without any specificity of them belonging to the apostles or the Apostolic era. In addition 1 Corinthians 13:8 indicates that the event which brings about the rendering inoperative of the gifts of prophecy and knowledge is “that which is perfect comes.” If one accepts Robert Gromacki’s conclusion that this “refers to the completion of divine revelation, both written and oral, accomplished with the writing of the last book of the

³ Gaffin, Richard B. Jr., in Wayne A. Grudem, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Robert L. Saucy, C. Samuel Storms, Douglas A. Oss, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. Wayne A. Grudem, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996). pp 100-103.

⁴ Gaffin, Richard B. Jr., in *ibid.* p. 116.

⁵ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1972). pp. 27-28.

Bible (Revelation) by the last living apostle (John). This means that these gifts of revelation and authentication were temporary, designed for the first century only.”⁶

It is necessary at this time to shift gears and begin a consideration of the nature of the gifts of the spirit not just the duration of them.

The Nature of the Gifts of the Spirit

The book of Acts outlines two main characters Peter and Paul and each seems to have a profound emphasis in their message and ministry. Peter proclaims the gospel to the Jews! Acts 2: 14-36 shows that Peter stands to deliver the message at Pentecost and begins with Joel 2 and lays out an argument that ends with the Jews crucifying the Messiah which would not be understood by Gentiles but in Acts 17:22-31 Paul address the Athenians and begins with God as creator and His authority over all peoples and even their places of habitation and presents the gospel from the beginning of Genesis. These two great Apostles and their role in Acts indicates that there is a shift in the emphasis of the work of the Holy Spirit with respect to the Church. Paul makes this even clearer as he lays out for the Romans the work of God in graciously including the Gentiles in the Church by a partial hardening of the hearts of Israel. Romans 11: 17-32 tells them,

¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, *remember that* it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you. ¹⁹ You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; ²¹ for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. ²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in

⁶ Robert G. Gromacki, *Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1977). p.163.

their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? ²⁵ For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery-- so that you will not be wise in your own estimation-- that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶ and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB." ²⁷ "THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." ²⁸ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; ²⁹ for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. ³² For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

This distinction between Jew and Gentile seems to this writer to be a powerful argument for what we see in the Church and that also relates to the gifts and how the Spirit uses them in the Church.

In 1 Corinthians 1:22, while Paul is making an argument about the Gospel and the Wisdom of God, he says that "Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom;" Gordon Fee has a wonderful treatment of these two general axioms⁷ in his commentary and while the argument of Paul is not to dwell on these axiomatic truths they are true none the less. This reality further outlines the distinction of the nature of the Church in Acts. We observe numerous signs and wonders in the first 12 chapters of Acts but there is a waning of those signs and wonders in chapters 13 to 28. Here we see Paul emerge as the predominant character in the book and his gifts are used to logically present the gospel to Greeks and show the gospel not the way that Gentile scholars did but to provide an understanding to the Gentiles who would listen and believe.

⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. F. F. Bruce, 15 vols., The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987). pp 74-75.

It is important here to take a journey through the book of Acts to support the importance of this distinction. If this author is correct the nature of the gifts directly relate not only to the Apostolic era but to the focus of the gospel being primarily Jewish in orientation by Peter for the first part of Acts and then Paul shifts that focus to the Gentiles in the latter part of Acts where we do not see the same measure of signs and wonders with the exception of Acts 19 and the Jews from Israel that Paul encounters which will be addressed later.

There are only three explicit passages where we observe the actual employment of the gift of tongues in Scripture, Acts 2, 10, and 19. The Spirit is involved with Acts 8 and the Samaritans but tongues are not explicitly mentioned as the sign of the Spirit. In each of the examples in Scripture the key people for whom the gift is evidence are all Jewish. In Acts 2 all parties involved at Pentecost are Jewish as indicated by verse 5-7, “Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven...and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language” (τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλούντων αὐτῶν). These Jews were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost and they gathered because they heard Galileans speaking some specific dialects which was quite unusual. So Tongues was a sign here for the Jews and to the Jews concerning what God had done and was doing as indicated in verse 11, “We hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God” (Αραβες, ἀκούομεν λαλούντων αὐτῶν ταῖς ἡμετέραις γλώσσαις τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ θεοῦ).

The next example of the gifts of the Spirit are found in Acts 8 but no explicit reference to tongues is made it is clear that the Spirit does not descend on the Samaritans until Peter and other Jewish disciples come to them and lay hands on them (Acts 8:14-17). Again Jews are present when these signs are exercised. The significance of Peter’s presence is a whole different discussion related to Matthew 16 which time does not permit but the purpose of the Spirit’s work

is both an evidence of genuine salvation for the Samaritans but also a testimony to the Jews that God had included the Samaritans in the Church.

While the inclusion of the Samaritans was probably something some Jews would struggle with clearly including Gentiles would push the boundaries of all cultural propriety. Thus God orchestrates the events in Acts 10:9-16 so Peter has to wait for dinner and he places Peter into a trance (*ἐγένετο ἐπ' αὐτὸν ἔκστασις*), and presents him with foods that were forbidden by the Jewish law to eat and God commands that Peter eat them. This dialogue involves three times that God tells Peter to eat and Peter argues with God about the correctness of eating the food. Putting the three times aside it is astonishing to this writer that God patiently provided an witness to Peter that would be explained in the next minutes of time. Peter is confronted with three men sent by Cornelius, a centurion, a Gentile, and asked to come to Cornelius' home saying that he was, "directed by a holy angel to send for you (Peter) to come to his house and hear a message from you"(Acts 10:22).

The events that follow in Acts 10 are remarkable. Peter goes and preaches to Cornelius and his entire household and before Peter can finish the message and offer the invitation, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also for the (the Jews) were hearing them (the Gentiles) speaking with tongues and exalting God" (Acts 10:44-46). While no language is directly referred to what would astonish Jews more than to hear Gentiles speak of God's work in Hebrew. This writer cannot say with conviction that is what happened but it does fit the description of what took place and the reaction of the Jews that heard.

There is one more incidence of Tongues and that is in Acts 19 and in this passage Luke calls the twelve men “disciples” and the conversation with Paul refers to “John’s baptism” which would suggest they were all Jews. After receiving the Holy Spirit and having Paul lay hands on them they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Acts 2, 8, 10, 19 all involves Jews as the focus of the expressions of the Spirit. It is this reality that has caused this writer to wonder if the sign gifts were not only part of the apostolic era but also necessary or at least the grace of a loving God accommodating the need for signs by those who were his chosen people.

Added to this evidence is the general way in which God dealt with His people the Jews. When He seeks to inaugurate the nation he provides signs and wonders through Moses and during the period of the Exodus. These expressions do not occupy an extended period of history but are relatively short and focused to authenticate Moses as the spokesman of God and as the leader of God’s people. Again in the history of Israel we see a concentrated period of signs and wonders surrounding Elijah and the ministry of the prophets of that period again to authenticate the message and messengers warning Israel of the impending judgment of the exile. Then we see again the works of God accompanying Christ and the Apostles for the establishment of Jesus as Messiah (John 20:30-31), and the work of the Apostles in the beginning of the Church (Hebrews 2:3-4).

The Holy Spirit seems to have made these expressions of His power and spectacular gifts a matter of the emphasis of the Church being Jewish until things shift to the Gentiles and then we see a dissipation of the gifts in practice and frequency. In seeking to find research that supports these conclusions there are references to the frequency of miraculous power being expressed but do not then make the connection to the focus of the Church being primarily Jewish. Some of the support of these ideas will be seen in the next section when the duration of the gifts is examined.

The Duration of the Gifts of the Spirit

The duration of the gifts of the Spirit has been a matter of discussion since the early 1900's. The gift of Tongues is especially of interest because it was reportedly observed and then said to be the "evidence of a second, definite work of the Spirit available to every believer."⁸ The phenomena we now call Tongues began to appear in the early spring of 1906 with the "Speaking in strange utterances, wild excitement, and the preaching of the new theories made the Apostolic Faith Mission at Azusa Street the center of attention."⁹ While the first reported speaking in Tongues was of Agnes Ozman who was reported to speak Chinese for three days before she could return to her native English.¹⁰ Gromacki states, "The conclusions of linguistic scholars have also shown that modern glossolalia consists of unknown sounds and that some of the claims of speaking known languages are false."¹¹ Gromacki concludes this section of his dissertation with this observation, "the essential character of this new (Charismatic) movement is therefore at variance with the Biblical phenomenon of speaking in known languages."¹²

There are those within the dispensational camp that are divided as to what Tongues is in 1 Corinthians 14. Some say that it is a foreign language spoken which the congregation does not know and a translator would be required to understand what was being said.¹³ Still others will assert that the tongues spoken of in 1 Corinthians 14 are not human languages but unintelligible

⁸ Michael G. Moriarty, *The New Charismatics: A Concerned Voice Responds to Dangerous New Trends* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). p. 20.

⁹ Ibid. p. 21.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 23.

¹¹ Robert G. Gromacki, "A Scriptural Evaluation of the Modern Tongues Movement" (Dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1966). p. 117.

¹² Ibid. p. 119.

¹³ George W. Zeller, *God's Gift of Tongues* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1978). p. 66.

ecstatic utterances.¹⁴ One observation this writer has been challenged by is that there are eight uses of *γλώσση* in the singular in 1 Corinthians 14 and equally eight uses of *γλώσσαις* in the plural in the same passage. It appears to this writer that when Paul uses the singular *γλώσση* it always is accompanied by some restriction by the apostle Paul and the plural uses *γλώσσαις* except 1 Corinthians 14:23 which does not conform to either observation. Where the plural is used Paul admonishes the church not to restrict tongues. This writer believes that 1 Corinthians 14:23 uses the plural to describe a different event and that is the entire church is speaking ecstatically together so the plural is appropriate but referencing human languages but ecstatic speech. Having been in a Pentecostal church when the entire church began to speak in tongues I can verify that as an unlearned young believer I did think they were all crazy. The conclusion of this writer is that in the singular use of tongue in 1 Corinthians 14 Paul is referring to ecstatic speech and in the plural use of tongues except vs. 23, Paul is referring to the Biblical gift of languages and not promoting them but restricting them and seeking to exalt Prophecy over a language that is not understood. Interestingly the plural use *γλώσσαις* is seen in Acts 2,10,19, Mark 16, and 1 Corinthians 12 when the spiritual gift of the Spirit is referenced. 1 Corinthians 14 appears to this writer to be about revelation and instruction to the church for growth and maturity not a treatise on the spiritual gifts.

The duration of tongues is also a matter of disagreement among scholars even within conservative evangelicalism. Some support the verb used in 1 Corinthians 13:8 for tongues *παύσονται* a third person plural indicative future middle, to be deponent and therefore stating that tongues would cease of their own even before the “perfect” comes.¹⁵ Dan Wallace asserts that the deponent rendering does not fit the evidence and the active voice

¹⁴ Charles R. Smith, *Tongues in Biblical Perspective* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1972). pp. 30-34.

¹⁵ Gromacki, *Called to Be Saints: An Exposition of 1 Corinthians*. p. 116.

for the “perfect” cannot support a deponent rendering therefore it is an indirect middle and “does not specifically address when tongues would cease, although it is giving a *terminus ad quem*: when the perfect comes.¹⁶

The reference to the perfect holds at least two different meanings. The one most argued by those who see the gifts as ceasing is that the “perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:10 refers to the completion of the canon of the New Testament. This view is also tied to the end of the apostolic era and held by many including, Gromacki, Smith, Warfield, Zeller, Ryrie, Gaffin, etc. These works have been cited in this paper and the bibliographic references are included so as to grant a reader the ability to verify the conclusions stated here. The second position held is held by those more defending the full-continuation of the Spiritual gifts especially Gordon Fee in his Corinthian Commentary.¹⁷ Some who believe in the cessation of the sign gifts but hold to the Second Coming as the terminus for the partial in 1 Corinthians 13 includes William McRae.¹⁸ These two concerns seem to be put together by Gaffin when he argues that Paul’s reference to the Spirit’s gifts is eschatological in orientation and therefore the Already/Not Yet applies in that we see is the initial activity of the Spirit but there is yet a full completion in the Second Coming.¹⁹ While the date of cessationism cannot be clearly defined there is a deplorable lack of evidence for these gifts of the Holy Spirit in the remaining books of Paul and the early Church as well as the remaining evidence through church history. Now it must be acknowledge that the early

¹⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996). pp. 422-423

¹⁷ Fee. pp. 642-646.

¹⁸ William McRae, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1981). pp. 92-93.

¹⁹ Gaffin, Richard B. Jr. in Grudem. pp. 28-29.

church fathers did indeed provide some language that requires attention but there are a number of treatments of these historic events provided by Gromacki in his dissertation pages 11-33, Warfield in his seminal work on Counterfeit Miracles pages 35-69, the entire work of Coppes,²⁰ Farmer pages 24-34 just to name a few resources. It seems dubious that there was in any way a consistent evidence of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit being normative in the church after the apostolic era.

The Catholic Church beginning in the 6th century relegated the whole of the work of the Spirit to the sacraments and through the sacraments grace is bestowed upon the faithful but the syncretism begun under Constantine and remaining throughout the life of the Roman Catholic Church, “began to create a new class of heroes called saints.”²¹ In order to become a saint it was necessary for at least two people to attest to a miracle being done in the name of the person or by the person.²² There seems to be little evidence of actual miraculous gifts of the Spirit continuing throughout church history after the apostolic era. The fact that supernatural elements exist throughout the period of the Church, if verified, only affirms that Holy Spirit is supernaturally involved in the Body of Christ which is theologically consistent with the work of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity within the Church. This does not demand a full-continuation of the miraculous sign gifts given to the Church.

Conclusion

²⁰ Leonard J. Coppes, *Whatever Happend to Biblical Tongue* (Chattanooga, TN: Pilgrim Publishing Company, 1977).

²¹ Warfield. pp. 73-92.

²² *Ibid.* pp. 85-90.

Thus this writer is convinced the issue of duration must be tied to purpose or nature of the gifts not to time per se. If the conclusions of this writer are correct and the nature of the gifts is to be tied to the focus of the gospel then with the shift from the Jew to the Gentile by Paul in Acts 13 and 28 one would expect to see a waning of the miraculous gifts and a prominence of the understanding gifts in the Church after the apostolic era. Indeed we do see a waning of the sign gifts and the prominence today of the speaking and serving gifts these cannot be denied. To this writer that does not mean the sign gifts are gone per se it just means the emphasis of the gospel and the focus of the Church is to the Gentiles. This is seen in the writings of Paul in Romans 11: 22-29,

²² Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³ And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more shall these who are the natural *branches* be grafted into their own olive tree? ²⁵ For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; ²⁶ and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." ²⁷ "And this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." ²⁸ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; ²⁹ for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Prophesied by Jesus in Luke 21:24²³ "Woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people, ²⁴ and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. Affirmed by Paul to the Galatians in Galatians 3:3-14,

⁵ Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? ⁶ Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. ⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify

the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. ¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." ¹² However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them." ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"-- ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

With this shift from the Jew to the Gentiles came a predictable shift in the way the Holy Spirit both addressed, prepared and worked among the Gentiles, that is why this author believes that we cannot relegate the sign gifts to being gone except the gift of tongues, but rather those gifts are no longer the preferred gifts for authenticating the messengers and the message to Israel as they were in the beginning days of the church and the initial work of Peter among the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles prior to the time of Paul taking the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts 28:29.

This author would suggest that at the time the gospel is once again focused on the Jews in the days of the tribulation many of these same gifts will again be used and employed in the presentation of the gospel and the gift of tongues may be the only way to explain the phrase used in Revelation 5:9-10, "and they sang a new song saying, Worthy are you to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from **every tribe and tongue and people and nation.** (*Bold mine*) You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." It is certain that Israel did not reach every tribe, tongue, people and nation as they were instructed in Isaiah 25 and equally certain that we have not as the Church reached every tribe, tongue, people and nation. The Joshua Project estimates that there are 7,275 unreached people groups in the world that do not have a

witness of Christ yet at all.²³ It seems that it will be the witnesses of the tribulation that will fulfill reaching these people groups and making this statement a reality!

Regardless of how God fulfills the description of this verse it is for sure that until then during this, the times of the Gentiles, this generation will continue to struggle with the nature of the sign gifts and will desire to see more and more spectacular outworking of power in order to be like the early church, failing to see and understand that God works just as spectacularly through the still small voice of the Spirit and through his guidance of both individuals and the Church in the powerful witness of the wonderful works of God known as the Gospel.

²³ The Joshua Project, <http://joshuaproject.net> retrieved September 3, 2013.

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