

## What Was the Purpose of Speaking in Tongues?

In the only reference to speaking in tongues in the four Gospels, it is included in a list of miraculous manifestations which are to be given as “signs,” thus authenticating the gospel message as having divine authority. Moses, at Mount Sinai, did not give the law to Israel without manifestations of divine power to authenticate it. These manifestations were in keeping with the nature of the law, so that the mountain quaked, and smoked, and there were evidences of divine judgment, suggesting the character of the law and its penalties.

Since Israel had been under the law for some fifteen hundred years, it was needful that there be some divine authentication of the gospel message which was now displacing the law as a basis of man’s relationship to God. In Mark 16:17-19 the Lord Jesus gives a list of such authenticating “signs.” which follow “those who believe”; and verse 20 adds, “And they went out and preached every where, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through accompanying signs.”

Hebrews 2:3, 4 seems to confirm this view: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.” This last clause is significant, for nowhere in Scripture is it recorded that people sought the gift of tongues. The gift, whenever given, was by the sovereign act of God.

The list of signs given in Mark 16 as authentication of the gospel message is in keeping with the character of the gospel. There were powers of healing and overcoming the adverse effects of sin. Just as the demonstrations of God’s power at Sinai were in keeping with judgment, so these were in keeping with salvation. The gift of tongues is likewise suited to this context, since this gospel dispensation the God was no longer to be presented only to “the house of Israel” ( Matt 10:6 ), but was to be preached to “every creature” ( Mark 16:15 ).

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