

Pentecost / The Festival of Weeks 5784

In this year's article, there will be a focus upon this Festival and the events that took place on it, which are recorded in the book of Acts chapter 2. Luke, the traditional author of the book of Acts, emphasized that when the time had been fulfilled of the festival to come, this means when the counting of seven full weeks were fully completed, and the next day had come (50 days in total), all were together in Jerusalem. It is stated in Acts 2:2,

"And it came about suddenly out of the heaven, a sound, just as a strong rushing wind and it filled all the House where they were sitting."

The question which must be answered is, in what house were they sitting? Although much of the believing community relates this to the upper room, it is most likely a reference to the Temple, as the Hebrew term for the Temple is the Holy House. It is in the Temple, where the Pentecost must be observed, as it is one of the three Biblical Festivals which are required to travel to Jerusalem, i.e., the Temple, to fulfill these High Shabbats.

When examining the Biblical text relating to this Festival in Acts chapter 2, there is an emphasis on the sound which was heard. This sound was accompanied with tongues of fire, which came and were placed upon each believer, and each of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. As an outcome of being filled with the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in **other tongues** (ἐτέραις γλώσσαις), as the Spirit gave them to speak. The phrase which appears in Acts 2:4 which is translated as **other tongues** is most significant. Koine Greek has two words for "other". The first is ἄλλος and the second is ἕτερος. Although these two words are frequently translated into English using the same word "other", there is a significant difference between them. The Greek word ἄλλος means another one of the same kind or type; whereas the Greek word ἕτερος means another of a different kind or type. The fact that ἕτερος was used in Acts 2:4 has some serious implications.

There are those who claim that what happened on the Festival of Shavuot in Acts chapter 2 is that those who spoke in tongues simply spoke other known languages and therefore the gift of speaking in tongues is simply when the Holy Spirit allows someone to speak in a recognized language, where previously he or she did not know this language. Allow me to state that I do not have the gift of tongues and I am not writing this article based upon any experience which I have had; rather, I am only basing the content of this article on what is stated in the Bible. The issue which is going to be addressed concerns those who teach that when the Scriptures refer to the

spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, whether or not they are correct in their assertion that it is always referring to a known language.

Before we begin reviewing some key verses dealing with this issue, I do believe that if G-d wants a person to speak a language that he or she does not know, the Holy Spirit can enable this one to speak a new, known language. However, when examining Scripture relating to this spiritual gift, it becomes clear that this is not what is being referred to when the Bible discusses speaking in tongues. Another false teaching relates to viewing the receiving of the Holy Spirit in two distinct manners. Some make an invalid distinction between the receiving of the Holy Spirit when one accepts the Gospel and a second, separate event referred to as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. In regard to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, these teach that the evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is always the speaking in tongues. This leads to a very basic question, *“Does every believer have the gift of speaking in tongues?”* Paul most clearly answers this question in 1 Corinthians 12:29-30,

μη παντες αποστολοι μη παντες προφηται μη παντες διδασκαλοι μη παντες δυναμεις
μη παντες χαρισματα εχουσιν ιαματων μη παντες γλωσσαις λαλουσιν μη παντες
διερμηνευουσιν

Although most modern translations place these two verses in the form of a question, it is most informing when they are simply translated literally:

“Not all (are) apostles, not all (are) prophets, not all (are) teachers, not all (are) do miracles, not all (have) the gift of healing, not all speak with tongues, not all interpret.”

This passage makes it most clear that not every believer has the gift of speaking in other tongues. In support of this, the fact that in Acts 2:4 the word ἕτερος is used and not ἄλλος teaches that the author of Acts wanted to reveal that these languages were not known languages, but languages which were of a **different variety** from the various spoken languages in the world today and it is only by means of the Holy Spirit that a person can speak in this kind of tongue (language). Furthermore, Paul states,

ο γαρ λαλων γλωσση ουκ ανθρωποις λαλει αλλα τω θεω ουδεις γαρ ακουει πνευματι
δε λαλει μυστηρια

“For the one who is speaking a tongue, not to men speaks, but to G-d; for no one hears but (the) Spirit, but he speaks mysteries.” 1 Corinthians 14:2

If in fact the spiritual gift of tongues was a known language, then Paul would have never stated the content of this verse. He continues and says,

νυνι δε αδελφοι εαν ελθω προς υμας γλωσσαις λαλων τι υμας ωφελησω εαν μη υμιν
λαλησω η εν αποκαλυψει η εν γνωσει η εν προφητεια η εν διδαχη

“But now brothers, if I should come to you speaking tongues, what will I profit you; unless I should speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophecy, or by teaching.” 1 Corinthians 14:6

Paul mentions four other gifts of the spirit (words of revelation, words of knowledge, prophecy and teaching) which are conveyed to others by known languages; whereas the gift of tongues is not transmitted in a known language and therefore requires interpretation if spoken in a congregational setting. Paul commands that speaking with a tongue is forbidden in the corporate meeting, unless one interprets so that the church may receive edification.

θελω δε παντας υμας λαλειν γλωσσαις μαλλον δε ινα προφητευητε μειζων γαρ ο προφητευων η ο λαλων γλωσσαις εκτος ει μη διερμηνευη ινα η εκκλησια οικοδομην λαβη

“But I desire all of you to speak tongues, but more that you should prophesy; greater is the one who is prophesying than one speaking tongues, except if one interprets in order that the church should receive edification.” 1 Corinthians 14:5

If a person has the gift of tongues and there is no one present in the congregational service who can interpret what he is saying, then Paul instructs those who have the gift of tongues to be quiet during the meeting.

εαν δε μη η διερμηνευτης σιγατω εν εκκλησια εαυτω δε λαλειτω και τω θεω

“But if there is not an interpreter, he should be silent in (the) church; to himself (or herself) let him speak and to G-d.” 1 Corinthian 14:28

Paul also clearly states that this gift of tongues is not a sign for those who believe, but to unbelievers; whereas, the gift of prophecy is not for unbelievers, but for those who do believe, as prophecy edifies the congregation. In conclusion, Paul gives a very good principle which helps believers place the proper perspective on this spiritual gift. He writes to the Corinthians, and this is relevant for all believers, the following two verses,

ευχαριστω τω θεω μου παντων υμων μαλλον γλωσσαις λαλων αλλ εν εκκλησια θελω πεντε λογους δια του νοου μου λαλησαι ινα και αλλους κατηχησω η μυριους λογους εν γλωσση

“I give thanks to my G-d more than all of you tongues I am speaking, but in church I desire five words through my mind to speak in order that also others I should instruct, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.” 1 Corinthians 14:18-19

The purpose of the Festival of Weeks (Pentecost), which is recorded in Acts chapter 2, is to reveal to believers that through the redemption which one receives by means of the Gospel, he or she also receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, which enables believers to supernaturally fulfill the purposes of G-d and display the unity that was lost at the Tower of Babel, when humanity wanted to make a name for itself; rather than to serve G-d and bring to Him glory, which is expressed through righteous behavior. Frequently, when this Festival is observed, many remember the gift of tongues, and fail to understand what the Scriptures actually teaches concerning this gift and how it relates to the order which G-d wants to bring to His New Covenant people.