

This theme of global proclamation and ingathering points to the fulfillment of God's pledge that, in Abraham's seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed. But in the flow of salvation history, this promise came as God's counter-response to His judgment at Babel.

- The Flood event represented a typological "new creation" in which the Lord purged His creation and started over with a new Adam (cf. Genesis 1:28-30 with 9:1-3). Yet this new creation was only symbolic and non-ultimate. This was evident first in the continuance of creational enmity (9:2-6) and human sin (9:20-27). But it was most spotlighted by the Babel event that immediately followed in the Genesis account (11:1-9).
- The Genesis writer introduced this event by first presenting a table of nations *when nations didn't yet exist in the salvation history*. Coming out of the ninth chapter, the human race was still unified as one community. By enumerating without explanation a table of distinct nations living in separate regions and distinguished by different languages (10:1-32), the narrator was pointing forward to the Babel event as the basis for this unexplained development. Babel is the explanation for what we see in the world, namely a human community distributed according to tribes, tongues, nations and people.
- At Babel, God judged the human race and testified to creational estrangement by scattering mankind across the face of the earth and confusing their languages. From that point forward, there was no denying creational alienation; men were isolated and estranged from each other linguistically and culturally as well as geographically. And despite endless human efforts at reunification since that time – whether by conquest, conciliation, accommodation or religious or philosophical indoctrination, there was to be no reunion. The human race would remain fractured and scattered until God Himself intervened.
- The promise to do just that followed immediately on the heels of Babel. The God who had scattered mankind at Babel – scattered them from Himself as much as from one another (ref. 11:4) was now pledging to reconcile and restore them to Himself through Abraham (12:3b). That promise, nurtured through the centuries, had now, at Pentecost, come to the time of its fulfillment and fruition. God was not reversing the judgment of Babel by restoring the nations to their former condition of speaking and understanding one *language*; rather, He was unifying them in the shared hearing and understanding of one *message*: the message of His mighty saving work in His Son. The Spirit was set to begin His appointed work of forming a new human community, united not by language, geography, ethnicity, culture, national heritage, common cause, or any other natural or human concern, but by the gospel of the Son and spiritual union with Him (cf. Ephesians 4:1-6; Revelation 5:1-10).

- d. Thus the salvation-historical significance of Pentecost alone indicates that Luke was referring to the *gospel* when he observed that each one present was hearing in his own language “the mighty deeds of God” (2:11). But this understanding is reinforced by both Peter’s subsequent explanation to the people and the larger biblical context. Whether the focus in a particular text is on judgment, mercy, retribution, deliverance, provision, etc., God’s mighty deeds always converge in His overarching intention to redeem, restore and perfect His creation. There are no “great things” of God that are distinct from His work of redemption.
- e. Before moving on to Peter’s explanation of what was transpiring, it is worthwhile to consider further the phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” – what it is and how it is to be understood (and possibly employed) in the Church today.

The first thing to emphasize is that the Pentecost episode involved people, through the power of the Spirit, being enabled to speak in *actual human languages otherwise unknown to them*. Luke’s terminology as well as his description leave no doubt that this was the case (ref. 2:6-11). This understanding is further substantiated by the role and significance of the tongues-speaking phenomenon as a key aspect of Pentecost fulfillment as discussed above. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that speaking in tongues has a different meaning in its other occurrences in Acts (10:46, 19:6). This is particularly evident in the episode in Cornelius’ house, which represented, as it were, the completion of Pentecost as salvation-historical fulfillment.

The more difficult passage addressing the topic of tongues-speaking is Paul’s treatment in 1 Corinthians 12-14. That context finds interpreters all over the board, with some concluding that Paul was endorsing “angelic languages” and other ecstatic speech in the Church, while others see Paul insisting that tongues were soon to cease. Without going aside into a lengthy, in-depth examination, it’s appropriate to make a few summary observations about this context.

- 1) First of all, Paul’s emphasis in this passage is on the fundamental truth that spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of *edification*. The Spirit gives them, not for the possessor’s benefit per se, but the benefit of the Body. Spiritual gifts are key to the Body “causing the growth of the Body.”

Spiritual gifts – including the gift of speaking in tongues – have their *express* purpose in edifying other Christians; this means each individual gift (“manifestation of the Spirit” – 12:7) must be understood and employed in that way and toward that end. Where there is no spiritual ministry to or edification of other believers, one of two things is indicated: *Either an authentic spiritual gift is being employed in an illegitimate way, or what is occurring or being applied is not actually an endowment of the Spirit at all*. Spiritual gifts can be misused – as they were at Corinth, but every authentic gift of the Spirit always works for the “common good.” Any purported gift that doesn’t do so is not of the Spirit.