

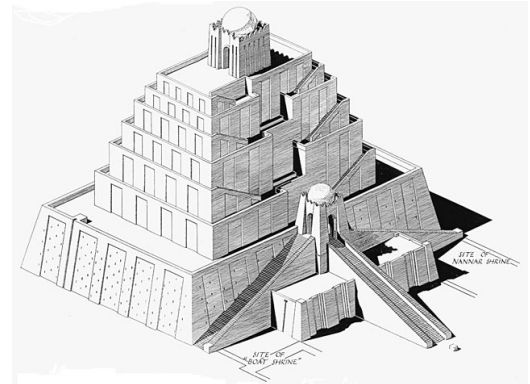
Series on First Corinthians  
By Doug Hamilton

Chapter 14:1-19 The Big Controversy - "Speaking in Tongues"

Opening for Lesson on Tongues

More than forty centuries ago, an event would change the world in a way that we still see the effects today. Following the flood, the descendants were told to "*Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it*" (Gen 9:7). The Hebrew catches it the best for the command was to "swarm" or "spread out". Instead they decided to group together and build a city in the Land of Shinar, what we call modern day Iraq.

- They were all of one language (Gen 11:1).
- They planned to unite on a grand scheme of constructing a tower (Gen 11:3).
- They wanted to make a name for themselves by not scattering as the Lord had commanded (Gen 11:4).
- God planned to force them to scatter throughout the world (Gen 11:6).
- His plan to do so was to confound their language into many dialects (Gen 11:7).
- This was why the Tower was referred to a "Babel", for that was what they sounded like to each other in the end...babble.



According to the secular publication The Power of Babel: A Natural History of Language by John McWorter, there is no real evidence of a "Proto-world" language. In other words, if you were to trace back all 6,000 languages and dialects of the world today, it would boil down to a few dozen. Of these remaining languages, there is not a discernible common language element which could have been an originating "Proto-world" language. Simply put, dozens of languages existed with no common point of origination. Could this be because all the languages arrived on the scene at one time? If you believe the Bible to be the word of God, and this account is in the Bible, then the answer is YES! The tower of Babel did occur and the Bible is absolutely to be trusted.

- It is in our languages that have the power to unite or divide. We can only go as far as our communication unites us. On that day in the Land of Shinar, men divided from a language barrier and nations were settled in accordance to a common tongue.

Advancing Two Thousand Years to Christ

It was during closing of Jesus' earthly ministry that He instructed the "Galileans turned apostles" to take the gospel to every people of every nation of the empire (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47). One of the primary problems was the same language barrier from the days of Babel. Though they might have loosely shared a few tongues, such as Greek, there were likely hundreds of languages and dialects. Without proper communication the gospel message would fall on deaf ears.

- Jesus said that speaking of tongues would be present in those days as a sign (Mark 16:17).

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- From the very onset of the church during Pentecost, we find that Jesus used the Spirit of God to break that language barrier just as He promised.
  - Acts 2:6-8 And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> They were amazed and astonished, saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> “And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?”
- These rough talking Galileans actually fluently praises God in at least 16 identifiable languages as stated by the visitors of Pentecost.
  - Acts 2:11 "...we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”
- Later on God also signified in the same way that the gentiles were being added to the Body of Christ.
  - Acts 10:44-46 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. <sup>45</sup> 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. <sup>46</sup> For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God..."
  - Acts 11:15 "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning...."
- Yet a third time Paul received the same result in the acceptance of "certain disciples" in the region of Ephesus.
  - Acts 19:6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came to them, and they began to talk in other languages and to speak what God had revealed. (God's Word)
- As some versions state for the word "tongues", they are languages, not unidentifiable *babble*. The curse of Babel was temporarily lifted in the church of the first century so God's will to spread the gospel could be carried out. To fluently speak or understand a language that you have not studied would be a miracle as Paul summarizes it in 1 Cor 12:10.

1 Corinthians 14:1-5 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup> For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries. <sup>3</sup> But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. <sup>4</sup> One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. <sup>5</sup> Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

- In the last chapter we covered the need for the greatest characteristic of the Christian, which is love. With it the church would thrive, but without it, all is lost.
- For the Corinthians, they had been using the gifts that God gave them to be divisive instead of building the church. They were abusing the power of an identifiable and viable

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language with mere *babble* in an effort to exalt themselves in the same way the great orators of the past whom passed through Corinth. To that Paul reiterates the following:

1 Corinthians 14:6-12 But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? <sup>7</sup> Yet *even* lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? <sup>8</sup> For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? <sup>9</sup> So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup> There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no *kind* is without meaning. <sup>11</sup> If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. <sup>12</sup> So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

- They did not have a secret language that not even they could understand for they would have no way of determining the meaning. The speaking of tongues had to go with the interpretation of tongues and understanding, for otherwise it was meaningless. They tried to impress with their vernacular abilities, but in the end their babble had become their Tower of Babel with a scattering called division.

1 Corinthians 14:13-17 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. <sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

- Those who were causing confusion to the worship assembly through existential experiences of ignorance needed to follow Paul's simple wisdom. What is done in the Spirit must be aligned with understanding.

1 Corinthians 14:18-19 I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; <sup>19</sup> however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

- If one were to travel the paths that Paul had to make, many mother tongues and dialects of those tongues would be required. Paul possessed this ability in and apart from Rosetta Stone. He mightily possessed the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. It did not matter where he went or what culture he was in, he could become all things for all men in part because the language barrier had been removed. To him, just five words of understanding were worth more than ten thousand words of babble.

### Mihai and the Market

Many years ago while on a trip to foreign country, I was in a large open market attempting to buy some for the mission house. Not being familiar to the culture, I underestimated the

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complexity of something as simple as purchasing vegetables from a merchant at a stand. The language that hundreds of people there was not my own and just listening to everyone negotiate the best prices. Combined with their many voices were the many other sounds of the market. It was rather mesmerizing, for the entire spectrum had become nothing more than noise. I was in the middle of hundreds of people there for the same reason, yet felt completely alone.

Then from a few stands over I hear a familiar language of someone calling out to me in my native tongue. It was Mihai, a convert from the mission. He spoke English quite well and was happy to communicate on my behalf. It was his voice to which I replied, was assisted and able to complete my task.

This is how God designed us, to communicate, work together and make a difference in the end for the kingdom. Some in the Corinthian church had forgotten the purpose and meaning of the miraculous gifts. Some were to remove physical barriers, some to remove barriers of ignorance and doubt, some to remove barriers of persecution and some to remove language barriers in place since the days of Babel. In the end it was to place the early believers under the confirmed guidance of the apostles to which Jesus sent to lead the church.

### Application

In what spirit do we carry our own worship services?

Do the songs we sing resonate to one another a clear message of praise and thankfulness to the Lord?

When we pray, is it with the focus and understanding that God would have us to have?

When we hear the words of the one heading up the Lord's table, do they really connect to us?

Do the lessons preached communicate in such a way that challenge us to serve Him better every day?

Communication: There should be a lot of that occurring when we assemble on the first day of the week and all the other days of the week.

Brothers and sisters: "...let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:15-17)