

## The Inconvenient Sign Acts 2:4-21 (February 2, 2025)



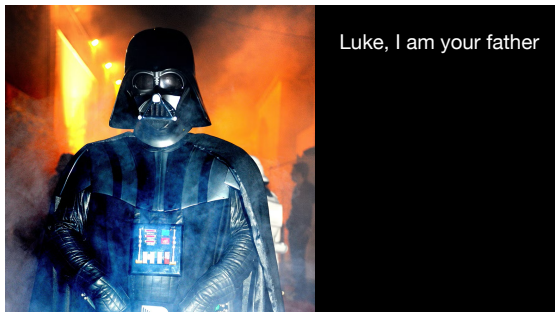
### Collective false truths.

What is a collective false truth?

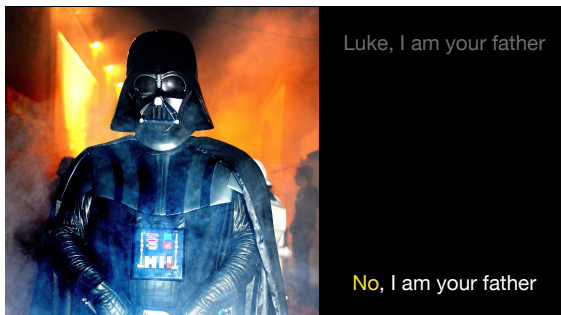
A collective false truth is something that we absolutely believe is true – many would bet our last \$100 it is true – **except it isn't true.**

It is often referred to as – **the Mandela Effect** – so named because many people are convinced they remember Nelson Mandela dying in the 1980s even though he went on to become President of South Africa and actually died in 2013.

What are some examples?



When Darth Vader cuts off Luke Skywalker's hand we clearly remember him saying, "Luke, I am your father."



Except he didn't.



Life is like a box  
of chocolates

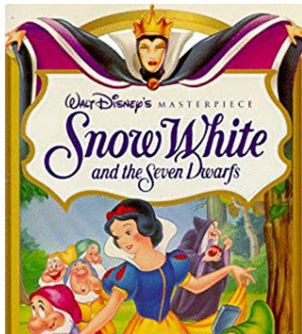
And we know Forest definitely said that – Life is like a box of chocolates.



Life is like a box  
of chocolates

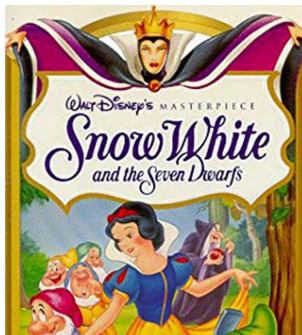
Life **was** like a box  
of chocolates

Except he didn't.



Mirror, mirror on the  
wall, who's the fairest  
of them all?

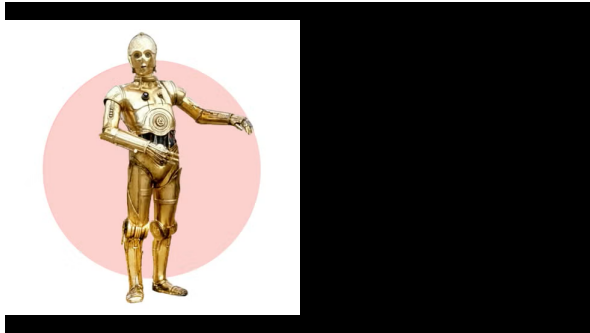
And every day the evil Queen in Snow White asks her magic mirror, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?"



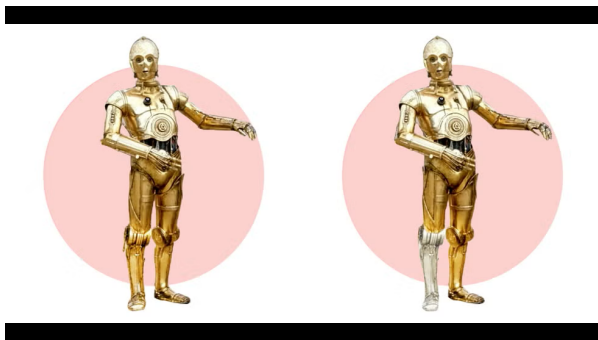
Mirror, mirror on the  
wall, who's the fairest  
of them all?

**Magic** mirror on the  
wall, who's the fairest  
of them all?

Except she didn't.



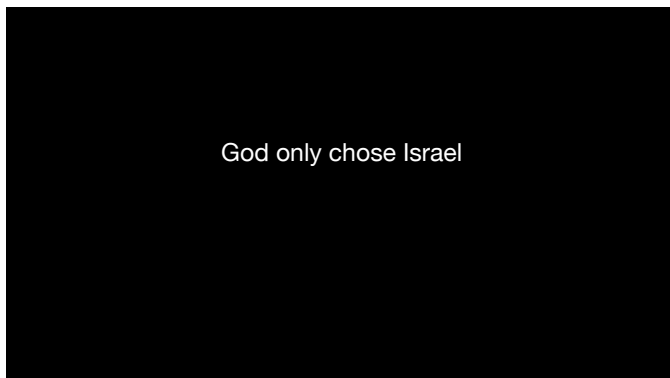
And we are sure that C-3PO is entirely golden.



Except he isn't. His right leg is silver.

There are things just that seem so right – we come to believe they are right. Most of the people around us believe it – so as far as we are concerned – it must be true.

It is how Israel came to absolutely believe:



**God only chose Israel.**

Israel and Israel alone are who God wants.

Israel was convinced that if you check the Old Testament Scriptures it says right there in black and white – God **only** chose Israel.

God only chose Israel

Except He didn't

### **Except He didn't.**

It was an **inconvenient truth** that He also wants the nations – so it one that they collectively dismissed.

What was much more convenient – much more comfortable – was to think they were special – and God **only** loved them.

The result was Israel failed in her calling.

But the Lord kept sending reminders that His plan was for the nations.

One of those recurring reminders was **tongues**.

Tongues was **the inconvenient sign** – pointing Israel back to the truth that God desires to save the nations – all of them.

And on the day God's plan moved to focus on reaching the nations – this inconvenient sign – tongues – was heard in Israel once again.

We have seen that the book of Acts tells us that:



**We must strive to see His kingdom come, through the empowering of His Spirit, by witnessing to the nations, until He comes again.**

Today, we come to:





## 2:4-21 The Inconvenient Sign

As the church was formed – God wanted to make clear – this new people was always designed to include Gentiles.

What we will see this morning is:



**Tongues was a sign that God's plan has always been to reach every nation – we must never forget that.**

**Tongues was a sign that God's plan has always been to reach every nation – we must never forget that.**

Today, the church is mainly Gentile.

Gentiles in the church is not an issue – but perhaps there are other groups that we think don't belong.

It is so much easier to just focus on **us** – **our** family, **our** church, **our** city.

But God wants men and women of every type – every social grouping, every strata of society and every type of tribe – and **that** we **do** need to remember.

But on the day of Pentecost the group that stuck in the craw of the early church – was Gentiles.

That is why: **The Inconvenient Sign Returns.**



## **First – The Sign is Heard 4-11:**

Look with me at Acts 2:4:

Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them.

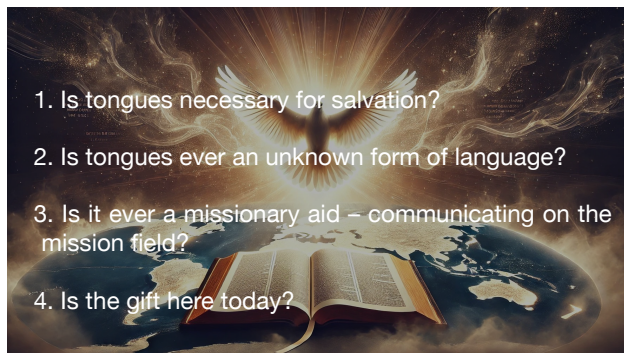
My understanding is these tongues were one of the empowerings of the Spirit.

There is so much confusion around tongues. Unfortunately, this can cause us to miss the main point of this sign.

But I do know there are questions that keep being asked.

I have preached on these questions when we went through 1 Corinthians 12-14.

I will briefly tell you where I stand – but please be clear – if you come to a different conclusion – that is fine. We just ask this not become a point of contention.



### **1. Is tongues necessary for salvation?**

Absolutely no. This one we will be contentious over. Paul is very clear – **not** all believers speak in tongues.

### **2. Is tongues ever an unknown form of language?**

No. I don't believe you can make a case that this was ever an unknown heavenly language. The word is the normal word for a known human language and that is how we always find the gift operating.

### 3. Is it ever a missionary aid – communicating on the mission field?

No. I don't believe we ever find it used this way.

### 4. Is the gift here today?

I personally believe the evidence of Scripture and history says no.



My understanding is that tongues had a specific purpose and as the church became mainly Gentile – then the purpose was completed and it ceased.

The last mention in Scripture of tongues is in the early 50s – around the time of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and the events of Acts 19.

As the gospel went out – Jews struggled to accept Gentiles could be part of the people of God.

Tongues was a sign that the plan was never Israel alone – the plan always included the nations – Jews **and** Gentiles.

In Acts 19 – we have the last mention of tongues. By this time, Samaritans were in, Gentiles were in – but it was still contentious.

Paul finds some disciples of John the Baptist. They were Old Testament saints waiting for Messiah. They were waiting for a Jewish Messiah and Jewish Kingdom. The idea of a spiritual kingdom with Gentiles was not what they wanted.

Tongues was a sign to these Jews – no – the new people of God includes Gentiles.

And after this time – tongues does not appear again in Scripture. Gentiles in the church ceased to be a huge issue.

To this day it is still an issue – but the core foundation was laid – Gentiles are in – as Gentiles.

And a number of early church fathers say it simply passed away.

You can read about this and more in the sermons on 1 Corinthians on our website.

But, I **don't** want these questions to be the focus of today – because it obscures the clear message of our passage.

Why was tongues heard on the day of Pentecost?

In our passage this morning – tongues was heard because it is a sign to Israel that Gentiles were to be a part of the church Jesus was forming.

This is the core reason, but please don't hear that this is the *only* reason.

In verse 33 Peter says the fact Jesus pours out the Spirit in this way proves He is the Messiah reigning from heaven.

It is a miracle that points to who Jesus is.

But in verses 4-21 the point is that tongues were a sign to Israel that Gentiles are a part of the church.

*Tongues* is the Greek word **glossa** – which means tongue – 'languages' – this word is not used of anything but **known human languages**.

It is important to understand that for the Jews – this sign was **not** something new.

Verse 5:

Now there were Jews staying in Jerusalem, devout people from every **nation** under heaven.

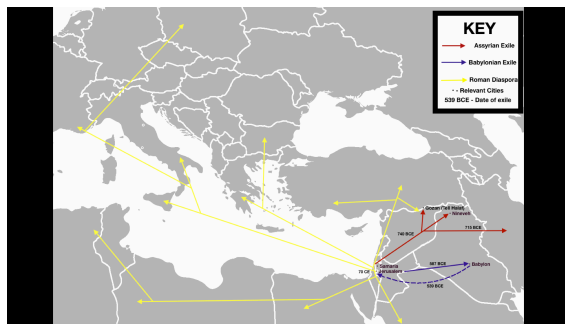
It was Pentecost – the Feast of Harvest – so Jews from across the Empire – from every nation were in Jerusalem.

Why is this important?

We need to understand the history of Israel and the nations.

From the day Joshua and the people of Israel entered the Promised Land – pretty much every Jew lived in the land of Israel.

Then it all began to change.



In 722BC Assyria conquered the ten northern tribes. They killed most, interbred with some – but they also carted some off to the nations.

Later Egypt took some from the southern kingdom away.

But the major stimulus to move Israel into the nations was Babylon.

By 587BC there were basically no Jews living in the Promised Land.

Most were in Babylon. Some in other nations.

But then Babylon was conquered by Persia.

And then in 539BC – the Persian ruler Cyrus made an edict that allowed the Jews to return to Palestine.

But many had found life in Babylon and in the other major nations comfortable. They had made a life there.

The result was that only around 50,000 Jews returned to the Promised Land under Nehemiah and Ezra.

So, while some were in the land, most Jews now lived outside of Palestine.

Over the next centuries Rome and Greece rose to power.

They encouraged the peoples of their Empires to move around.

So, by the days of Jesus it is estimated that the number of Jews living in the land of Palestine was somewhere from 500,000 possibly up towards 2 million. Most think somewhere around a million.

But all agree there were **far more** – 3 million – possibly up to 5 million – living outside Palestine – mainly in the major Roman cities.

And surprise, surprise there was tension between these groups.

The Jews in Palestine – the ‘Hebraic Jews’ – looked down on the Jews living outside Palestine – the so-called ‘Hellenistic Jews’.

They thought that any true Jew would choose to live in the Land of Promise – the land given to Abraham and wait for Messiah.

And truth be told – these Hellenistic Jews had become integrated into the nations. They spoke Greek and the local language better than they spoke Aramaic or Hebrew.

Many thought of their new cities as home not Israel.

However, these Jews from across the Empire were expected to make a pilgrimage back to the Holy Land for three of the great festivals – the Festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Booths.

In reality, only the devout actually came back and not for every Festival – but a significant number did come back for each festival.

When they did, the Jews living in the land viewed these Hellenistic Jews as second class – as chasing the worldly dream.

Many felt these foreign Jews were not true Jews at all.

But one thing these Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews **did** agree on – Samaritans and Gentiles – neither were ever part of the plan of God.

In their minds – God's plan always centred on the Jews.

When the church was formed – one reason the Jews rejected it – is the fact it had Gentiles in it.

God knew this mindset must **not** be imported into His new people – the church.

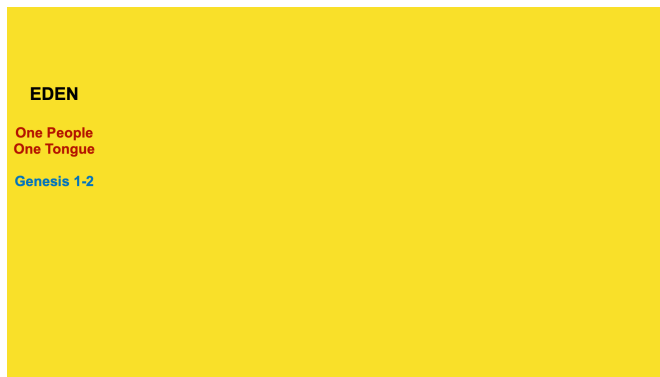
So, God sent an old sign – tongues – to remind the Jews that Gentiles were always part of the plan.

*Nation* – is the other crucial word here. It is the Greek word **ethnos** – it means *people* or *nation*.

These two words – **languages** and **peoples** – are part of an important theme in Scripture and part of the reason Israel was founded.

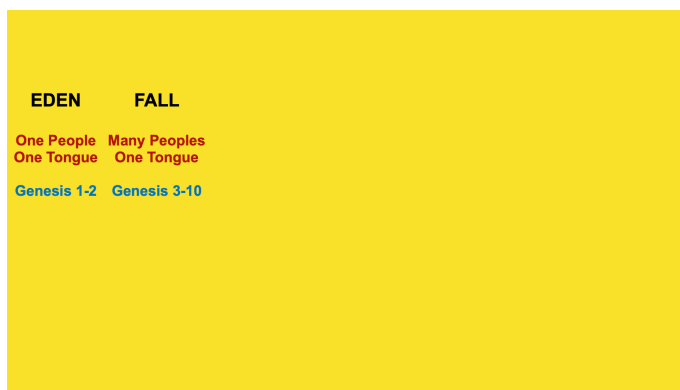
It is particularly prominent in Genesis 1-12.





**In Eden – God created a world that was good – a world in which there was one people and one tongue.**

God created Adam and Eve – one family – one people – speaking one language.



**Then came the Fall.**

The fall messed everything up.

In the chapters after the fall, we see this one family growing and spreading out across the earth.

After the flood the earth is reduced once again to one family, one nation, still speaking one tongue.

But Noah's descendants grow and begin to spread out and form nations.

In Genesis 10 we have the table of nations.

Genesis 10:32:

These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their family records, in their **nations**. The **nations** on earth spread out from these after the flood.

The result was **many peoples – many nations** – but still only **one tongue – one language**.

Then came another very significant event.

EDEN	FALL	BABEL
One People One Tongue	Many Peoples One Tongue	Many Peoples Many Tongues
Genesis 1-2	Genesis 3-10	Genesis 11

## Babel.

Listen to Genesis 11:1–8:

**The whole earth had the same language and vocabulary.** ... Then the LORD came down to look over the city and the tower that the humans were building. The LORD said, “If they have begun to do this as one people all having the **same language**, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let’s go down there and **confuse their language** so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So from there the LORD **scattered** them throughout the earth.

Sin led to God dividing the nations by giving them different languages.

The result was that these **many peoples** now had **many tongues**.

Different peoples – some paler, some browner, some darker – now each spoke different languages.

Add in sin and depravity and you have everything needed for racism, war, slavery – ongoing strife.

All are descended from Adam – but since you look and sound different – we are not one.

But God had a plan to restore – **one people – one tongue**.

More specifically:

EDEN	FALL	BABEL	NEW EDEN
One People One Tongue	Many Peoples One Tongue	Many Peoples Many Tongues	One People From Many Peoples One Tongue From Many Tongues
Genesis 1-2	Genesis 3-10	Genesis 11	Zeph 3:9; Rev. 5

## **One People From Many Peoples One Tongue From Many Tongues**

Undoing the fall – undoing Babel.

So many places you could go to see this – but two very clear ones.

From the Old Testament. Zephaniah 3:9:

For I will then restore pure speech to the peoples so that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him with a single purpose.

God's plan is to restore the one pure speech to all peoples so they can praise Him.

And in Revelation, we see this final plan worked out.

Revelation 5:9–11:

And they sang a new song: ... because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation.... You made them a kingdom.

**Many peoples** – united as **one kingdom**.

Verses 12-13:

I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, and everything in them say, Blessing and honour and glory and power be to the one seated on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!

**One people drawn from many peoples – praising God in one tongue – forever.**

But the plan from Babel to the new heavens had a few steps in between.

Back to Genesis.

Significantly, the very next thing we read about after Babel – is **Israel**.

EDEN	FALL	BABEL	ISRAEL	NEW EDEN
One People One Tongue	Many Peoples One Tongue	Many Peoples Many Tongues	One People One Tongue	One People From Many Peoples One Tongue From Many Tongues
Genesis 1-2	Genesis 3-10	Genesis 11	Genesis 12	Zeph 3:9; Rev. 5

God's plan to reverse the fall and Babel begins with one man.

Listen to the call of Abraham. Genesis 12:2:

I will make you into **a great nation**, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I am calling you Abraham – and from you – I will form one nation – *Israel* – which will become great.

Abraham and his sons would obviously speak the same language – so **one people** speaking **one tongue** – Hebrew.

Now, as far as Israel was concerned, what they heard was – one people – one nation – **only. We are the final plan.**

*But* that was **never** the *final* plan. They were only the **first** step in God's plan.

How do we know that? Because in the **very next verse** Genesis 12:3 – God said this:



**All the peoples – all the nations – on earth** will be blessed through you.

Verse 3 contains an inconvenient truth that Israel kept forgetting – **all nations**.

Right from its founding – Israel was meant to be a blessing to all nations.

The nations were to come to Jerusalem and see a picture of the final plan – one people and one tongue.

All those disobedient nations with their own language – the plan was to bless them by uniting them as one people through the Seed who will come from Abraham.

If you want to unpack the full theology of this – read Romans 11. Paul talks about God's plan to graft all the nations back into the root – Christ.

But until the Seed came – Isaiah 42:6 says Israel was supposed to be a light to these nations.

Unfortunately, Israel failed.

They were proud – **we** are the chosen ones – **you nations** are **not**. Instead of being a light to the nations – they despised the nations.

But then, something incredible happened on the **Day of Pentecost**.

EDEN	FALL	BABEL	ISRAEL	CHURCH	NEW EDEN
One People One Tongue	Many Peoples One Tongue	Many Peoples Many Tongues	One People One Tongue	One People From Many Peoples Many Tongues	One People From Many Peoples One Tongue
Genesis 1-2	Genesis 3-10	Genesis 11	Genesis 12	Acts 2	Zeph 3:9; Rev. 5

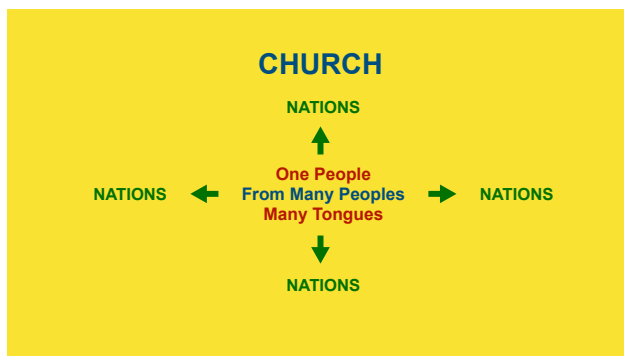
The church – the new people of God – was formed.

It would unite:

**One People From Many Peoples**

But these many peoples would still have:

**Many Tongues**



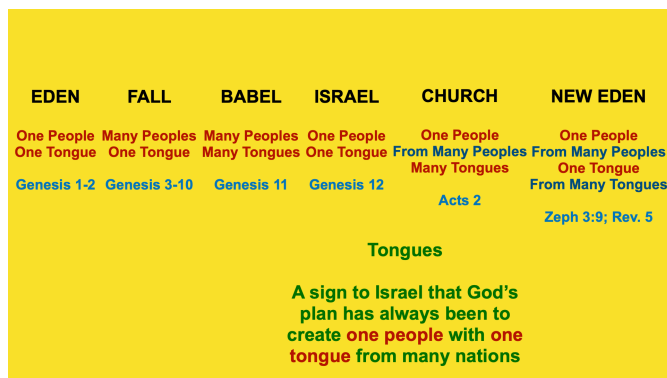
**The church** – the one people formed from many people – speaking many tongues – was go to the nations to share the gospel which can unite them as the people of God.

That is what we have today. Wherever you go in the world there are churches – united by the same gospel – worshipping the same risen King.

But different languages.

**So, what was the deal with the gift of tongues at Pentecost?**

A reminder – the plan was **never** Israel alone.



**Tongues was a sign to Israel that God's plan has always been to create one people with one tongue from *many nations*.**

**And if Israel ignored the sign – tongues was also a warning of judgment.**

The sign of tongues was not new – it had been sent to Israel a number of times.

Israel always had a tendency for mission drift and to forget the plan.

So, right from the first God had said – I have a sign I will send that will remind you that My plan is for **every** nation.

Deuteronomy 28:49 says this:

The LORD will bring a nation from far away ... **a nation whose language you won't understand.**

If Israel forgot to be a light to the nations and sinned by becoming like the nations – God would send a sign. The foreign languages of the invaders would be a sign – a rebuke to them.

They were meant to be a witness to them not become like them. And if they did not change – it became a sign of judgment.

And that is exactly what happened. Jeremiah 5:15:

I am about to bring a nation from far away against you, house of Israel ... a nation whose **language** you do not know.

And Isaiah 28:11:

For he will speak to this people with stammering speech and in a **foreign language**.

And it is this very verse from Isaiah that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 14 to remind Israel of the purpose of the gift of tongues.

1 Corinthians 14:21–22:



1 Corinthians 14:21–22:

It is written in the law, I will speak to this people by people of other **tongues** and by the lips of foreigners, and even then, they will not listen to me, says the Lord. **Speaking in tongues**, then, is intended as a **sign**, not for believers but for **unbelievers**.

ISRAEL	CHURCH	NEW EDEN
One People One Tongue Genesis 12	One People From Many Peoples Many Tongues Acts 2	One People From Many Peoples One Tongue From Many Tongues Zeph 3:9; Rev. 5
Tongues		
A sign to Israel that God's plan has always been to create <b>one people with one tongue</b> from many nations		

It is written in the law, I will speak to this people by people of other **tongues** and by the lips of foreigners, and even then, they will not listen to me, says the Lord. **Speaking in tongues**, then, is intended as a sign, not for believers but for **unbelievers**.

Tongues was always a sign to unbelieving Israel – that God's plan included the nations – and to reject this leads to judgment.

From Pentecost on the plan was the church – Jew and Gentile.

To reject this is to bring judgment.

Israel rejected this and in 70AD judgment fell.

But even the Jewish believers who formed the first church – struggled to accept this.

The idea of Gentiles as the people of God – it just seemed so wrong.

That is why in the book of Acts – when the gospel goes to new peoples – Samaritans in Acts 8 and Gentiles in Acts 10 – the sign of tongues was heard.

It was a sign that Gentiles were to be included in the people of God.

For example – Acts 11:17–18:

God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us ... “So then, God has given repentance resulting in life **even to the Gentiles**.”

Even today, we need to constantly remember – Jesus wants people from every kind of tribe and nation.

It is so easy to become complacent and focus just on our area.

But go into Brisbane City and listen. Even there you will hear the sounds of the nations.

Some Spanish, some Mandarin, Japanese, Afrikaans, German.

It is not a miraculous sign – but it should be a reminder – God’s plan is for every nation and every people.



### **So, what actually happened there on the Day of Pentecost?**

Verses 6-8:

When this sound occurred, a crowd came together and was confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded and amazed, saying, “Look, aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? How is it that each of us can hear them in our own native language?

Natural born Aussies – I have some unfortunate news. We are one of the few peoples in our multicultural world limited by one language.

For example – those here from mainland China would know at least one native language – say Mandarin – and often another dialect such as Cantonese – and be pretty good at an international trade language – English.

Makes me feel inadequate.

That is awesome – but even if you speak Mandarin, Cantonese and English – I suspect that Afrikaans might as well be ancient Norse to you.

But that gives us an idea of what it was like in first century Palestine under the Roman Empire.

Think about the 120. They are Galileans.

Their native language is Aramaic – the language the Jews began to speak during the Babylonian exile.

Since they are from Galilee they have a distinct accent – maybe they say JAYSUS – but it is still Aramaic.

But they were also Jews, so to read the Scriptures they would need to understand Hebrew – but it would not be what they spoke around the house.

Then, as part of the Empire most would also understand Greek pretty well.

What about these Hellenistic Jews from across the Empire?

Almost certainly they would know Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek – but their native tongue would be from where they grew up.

So, Medes would speak Median – those from Egypt – Egyptian – and so on. It is what they spoke around the table – it is what they dream in.

These Jews from the Empire came to Jerusalem but then they heard something unexpected – their native language.

When you are in a foreign country – you are surrounded by the white noise of that local language.

But when you are in a café – or on a bus – or in a line and you hear English – and if it has distinct Aussie drawl – you are drawn to it. You want to find a fellow Aussie and have a chat.

But what if you turn around and find a group of Japanese tourists who have clearly never set foot in our beautiful country – speaking in our wonderful language and dialect?

Something weird is happening.

Hearing people speak their native tongue drew these international Jews to the place – and when they got there – shocker – those speaking in their language were ... **Galileans**.

Galileans were **not** cosmopolitan. They did **not** know the languages of the Empire.

No wonder they were astounded and confused.

I only speak English and when I visit my brother in the UK they tell me – whatever you are speaking it is not proper English.

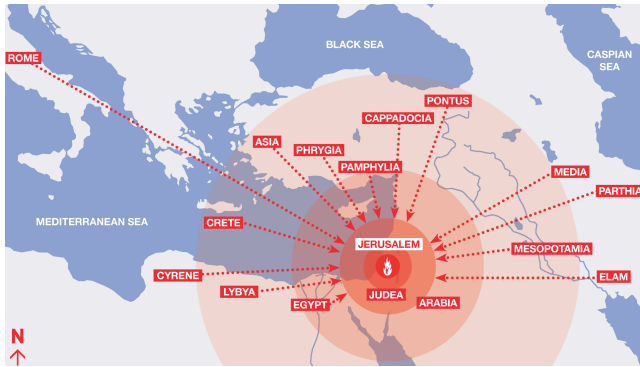
So, if one Sunday I began to speak the magnificent acts of God in Spanish – Nic Contreras Jerez would be very thankful – but more than a little surprised.

And then when I switched to perfect Korean – Erin Park would wonder how I can speak it better than her.

And when I dust off my perfect Swahili – now you absolutely know something miraculous is going on.

120 believers – speaking different languages – known earthly languages – that they never learned – declaring the miraculous acts of God.

What is going on here?



These are the nations involved. But – why these ones?

It is important the order in which Luke lists the nations these devout Jews came from.

He begins with those to the **east**.

PARTHIA,  
MEDIA, ELAM,  
MESOPOTAMIA



**Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia.**

JUDEA — PARTHIA,  
MEDIA, ELAM,  
MESOPOTAMIA



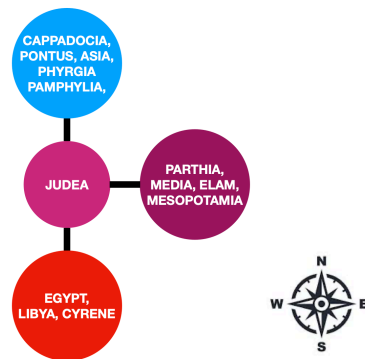
Then he lists **Judea** – the centre.

CAPPADOCIA,  
PONTUS, ASIA,  
PHRYGIA,  
PAMPHYLIA,

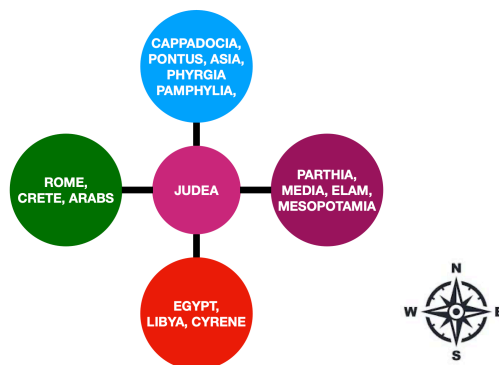
JUDEA — PARTHIA,  
MEDIA, ELAM,  
MESOPOTAMIA



Then nations to the **north** – **Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia.**



Those to the **south** – **Egypt, Libya and Cyrene.**



Finally, those to the **west** – **Rome, Crete, Arabs.**

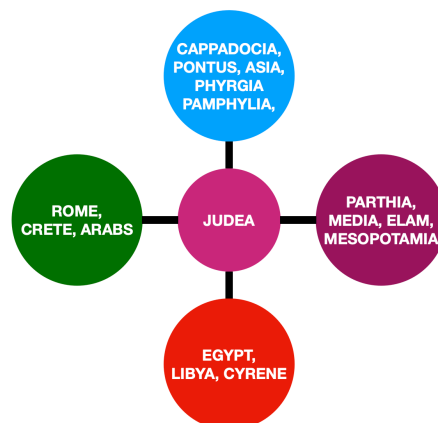
Arabia is actually east of Jerusalem – but it is thought the Arabs here are the people who migrated to northern Africa – which is west of Jerusalem.

But the point is that people from the four corners of the world have gathered in Israel and now they hear the mighty works of God in the languages of the nations.

This was always the plan. Isaiah 43:5–7:

Isaiah 43:5–7:

I will bring your descendants from the **east**, and gather you from the **west**. I will say to the **north**, 'Give them up!' and to the **south**, 'Do not hold them back!' Bring my sons from far away, and my daughters from the ends of the earth—**everyone who bears my name** and is created for my glory.



I will gather you ... from the **east**, the **west**, the **north** and the **south** – **everyone who bears my name.**

The plan was always – people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

People from the four corners of the world.

The point is those from every nation were to be a part of this new people God is forming.

But shocker – **Israel misunderstood.**



### **The Sign Is Missed            12-13**

Acts 2:12:

They were all astounded and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

The Jews **should** have understood.

Remember all those there at Pentecost are Jews. They didn’t need tongues to communicate.

They all spoke Aramaic and Greek and probably Hebrew as well.

The 120 could witness to them in Aramaic just fine.

This wasn’t a missionary miracle – this was a sign miracle.

Tongues – the sound of the languages of the nations – **known human languages** – declaring the glories of God was **a sign** that God had not varied in His plan.

The church must have – Jews **and** Gentiles – Israel **and** the nations.

Now this is important and we will see this again and again in Acts:

**Miracles in and of themselves do not lead to faith or even to understanding the message.**

These tongues were a spectacular miracle – but it didn’t lead straight to faith.

These are devout Jews. They cared enough to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Pentecost. They know their Bible.



Yet, they didn't connect the dots.

And some were even worse. Instead of being confused they were dismissive. Verse 13:

But some sneered and said, "They're drunk on new wine."

It is hard to be certain who these groups are.

I think the group in verse 12 are the ones from the nations who heard a message in their native tongue. They recognised something amazing was going on – they were just confused about what it meant.

This group here in verse 13 – I think this is likely the Jews from Jerusalem. They didn't speak any of these international languages, so these languages all sounded like so much gibberish to them.

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul says if someone hears uninterpreted tongues – it will sound like gibberish – and those who hear it will say – *you are out of your minds*.

I think that is what is happening here.

There is a crowd – some are saying it is a miracle but I don't get it – some are saying I don't hear any miracle – just some drunk people.

I have been to Pentecostal churches where – despite Paul's very clear instructions in 1 Corinthians 14 – the minister has urged the congregation to all pray in tongues together.

People are making noises all over the place – and it is quite a disturbing experience.

I understand why they might say – they must be drunk.

These Jews should have all known better – instead they all missed the point of the sign.

So, Peter steps up to explain it:



**The Sign Is Explained 14-21**

Acts 2:14–16:

Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and proclaimed to them, “Fellow Jews [those from around the Empire] and all you residents of Jerusalem [local Hebraic Jews], let this be known to you, and pay attention to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it’s only nine in the morning. On the contrary, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel.”

Come on people – they are **not** drunk – it is only 9.00am – this a fulfillment of prophecy – read your Bible.

It is interesting that Peter doesn’t go to one of the Old Testament passages that directly speak about tongues, a passage like Isaiah 28. He goes to Joel.

This passage speaks about prophecy – not tongues – **but** we need to remember that tongues **was** a form of prophecy.

If you read 1 Corinthians 14 we find that if tongues is understood – if you understand the language spoken – **or** if it is interpreted into a language you understand – then it is a form of prophecy.

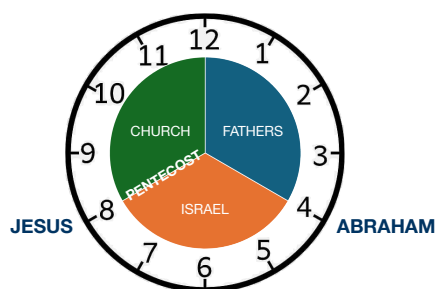
But why this passage from Joel?

There are a number of Old Testament passages that speak of the pouring out of the Spirit – but this one is the most explicit about **everyone** – **not just Jews** – **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord** being part of the new people of God.

After a warning to repent, Joel says that a day is coming when God will pour out His Spirit.

Verses 17-18:

**And it will be** in the last days, says God.



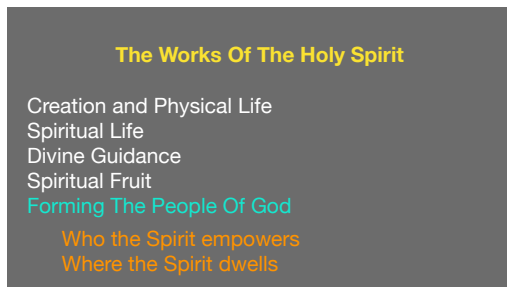
The divine calendar has now ticked over to the last age. Messiah has come – died – risen.

The days of the church are the last days before Messiah returns.

God says – in this age:

**I will pour out my Spirit on all people – literally all flesh.**

What does this mean?



Last week I told you that my understanding of Pentecost is that it involves God forming His new people.

And the difference between the Old and New Covenant focusses on two things.

**Who the Spirit empowers and where the Spirit dwells.**

First, we find He empowers – **all people – all flesh** – not just leaders.

Under the Old Covenant – He only empowered leaders.

Consider Numbers 11.

Moses is pouring his heart out to God – the task of leading this people is just too much for me.

So, Numbers 11:16–17:

The LORD answered Moses, “Bring me seventy men from Israel known to you as elders and officers of the people. Take them to the tent of meeting and have them stand there with you. Then I will come down and speak with you there. I will take some of the Spirit who is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you bear the burden of the people, so that you do not have to bear it by yourself.”

These men are leaders of Israel – elders and officers.

Clearly this is Spirit empowering because God takes some of the Spirit – the leadership that is on Moses – and puts it on them. This can’t be the indwelling of the Spirit.

But if you read on it turns out that only 68 of the 70 chosen ones present themselves to the tent of meeting.

Who knows if the two missed the memo or what.

The Spirit rests on these 68 and they prophesy – as proof they are empowered to lead the people.

But what about the two who didn't show up – the wonderfully named Eldad and Medad?

Turns out the Spirit **also** rested on them and they prophesied.

But a tattle tale runs to Moses – Eldad and Medad are prophesying too.

Joshua doesn't like that and says – Moses you have to stop them.

Verse 29:

But Moses asked him, "Are you jealous on my account? If only all the LORD's people were prophets and the LORD would place his Spirit on them!"

Moses longs for the day when the Spirit will be poured out on **all flesh**.

Not just a few leaders – but all the people of God.

This is what happens at Pentecost. It was not just a few that spoke in tongues – **all** the 120 did.

**Then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. I will even pour out my Spirit on my servants in those days, both men and women and they will prophesy.**

In Israel – the Spirit empowered leaders – who were predominantly men.

Now the Spirit is poured on all flesh – men and women, young and old.

These miraculous signs – prophecy, visions, dreams – are not just found in the leaders – but all the believers.

It was confirmation that the new age had begun.

Verses 19-20:

**I will display wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below: blood and fire and a cloud of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord comes.**

There is much debate about **when** this is fulfilled.

Many believe it is fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus and the founding of the church.

These signs and wonders are associated with Jesus – the angels and the Father spoke from heaven and Jesus did signs of the earth.

This view is strengthened because these are the words used of the miraculous around Jesus in verse 22 – wonders and signs.

The blood, fire, cloud and darkness could refer to Jesus's death and the founding of the church at Pentecost.

The moon turning to blood could refer to the church overcoming the nations – there is similar language in the Old Testament.

**Or** – Joel could be jumping to the end of the age – and these are the events associated with the Second Coming – the return of Jesus in judgment.

The Olivet Discourse and the Book of Revelation make it clear that these type of signs in the heavens and miracles on earth will be associated with the return of Jesus.

I personally favour the view that this refers to **both**.

This age starts with the signs of Jesus' First Coming and ends with the signs of His Second Coming.

But whatever view you take it doesn't alter the main point Peter wants to stress.

The main point is found in verse 21:

**Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

This is the other crucial part of the change in the work of the Spirit.

What changes is **not** that you now get saved by calling on the name of the Lord.

That is how Old Covenant saints got saved too.

No! The change is that now – it is **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord who is saved.

Those indwelt – those saved – will include Gentiles as well as Jews.

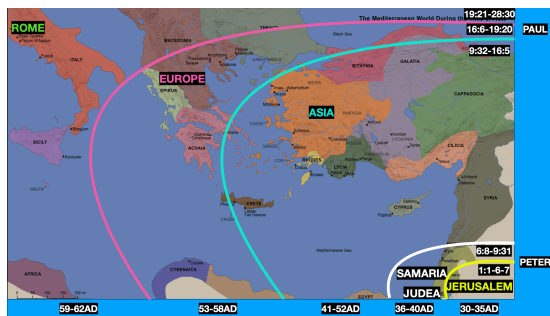
To this point in history – only Jews could call out to God and be saved.

To this point in history – if you want to be saved – you had to become a Jew.

The nations had to come to Jerusalem – come under the Law and the Old Covenant – to make the sacrifices – join the Feasts and Sabbaths – call out to God and be saved.

But right from the moment God called Abraham – the plan was for **one people from many peoples. One tongue from many tongues.**

Pentecost marked the beginning of the final stage of the plan.



From this moment – the gospel goes forth – through **Judea** – and then **Samaria** – the half-breeds – and finally to the world – to the nations – the peoples – yes to **Gentiles**.

But the inclusion of Gentiles was a hard and bitter pill that Israel and even Jews in the church struggled to swallow.

In Acts 6 – we are going to find tension between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews.

Acts 8 – the gospel reaches Samaritans – should they be in the church?

Acts 10 – the gospel reaches Gentiles – should they be in the church?

Acts 15 – the Jerusalem Council has to decide if Gentiles have to be more Jewish to be saved.

Acts 19 – the disciples of John weren't sure about joining this group filled with Gentiles.

Even the Apostles struggled to accept that this was really God's plan.

It seemed so obvious that God had chosen Israel and Israel alone.

I don't think there is an analogy that truly conveys this inbuilt discrimination to us.

Maybe the idea of homosexuals coming to Christ – Muslims coming to Christ – child molesters coming to Christ – people we might think are outside the love of God – it might give us a taste of the struggle the Jews in the first church felt.

But the point is whoever comes to mind – they are no further from God's love than you and me – and all belong in this kingdom – if they have faith.

Tongues was a sign to Israel that Gentiles – dogs – unclean – **were** to be in the kingdom.

Tongues was also warning to Israel of judgment if they reject the plan of God.

But in a sense, it should also be a sign to us – reminding us that all can be in this kingdom – **if** they call on the name of the Lord.



Here is the thing.

On the Day of Pentecost – the Jews were horrified to think that someone like you – someone like me could be in the church – be part of the people of God.

We are Gentiles.

Eventually they said – OK Gentiles can be in – but first they need to be more Jewish.

The church finally came to accept that all can come to God as they are.

Soon the church was mainly Gentile.

Today – we don't question whether the church is for people like us.

I can assure you our Elders discuss many thorny issues – can Gentiles join the church has never been one of them.

But the church keeps forgetting the lesson – that it is for all kinds of people – all types of tribes.

Often, when we go as missionaries – we want them to be more like us – more western.

Wear a suit and tie, sing Isaac Watts hymns, sit in a church with a steeple – and you too can be a child of God.

But, shocker – there were no westerners like us there on the Day of Pentecost.

It is a shock to Americans. But no Americans were there. No Aussies either.

They had barely heard of Britannia.

India was barely known. China, Korea, Japan beyond imagining.

Australia – never heard of it.

But tongues was a sign – every nation – every people – are to be gathered as the one people of God.

Brothers and sisters – the issue of tongues has been divisive in the church.

Irony.

The sign that was meant to unite us as one people has so often divided us.

Agree with me on tongues – disagree – that is fine.

But what we should all agree on is this – it points to the plan of God – one people from many.

EDEN	FALL	BABEL	ISRAEL	CHURCH	NEW EDEN
One People One Tongue	Many Peoples One Tongue	Many Peoples Many Tongues	One People One Tongue	One People From Many Peoples Many Tongues	One People From Many Peoples One Tongue From Many Tongues
Genesis 1-2	Genesis 3-10	Genesis 11	Genesis 12	Acts 2	Zeph 3:9; Rev. 5
Tongues					
A sign to Israel that God's plan has always been to create one people with one tongue from many nations					

God **will** be worshipped by a people drawn from every nation, every tongue, every tribe.

Those from all nations will bow the knee and hail Him King.

And we have the privilege of calling the nations to the cross.

If you are here and don't know Jesus – you can become one of His people by calling on His name.

God wants you – bow the knee – call on His name and be saved.

If you are a Christian, perhaps it is an inconvenient truth that we are commanded to be part of this harvest – easier to leave it to others – but God demands we join the harvesters.

Perhaps there are groups you prefer not to reach – but God wants them all.

Here is the gospel for the nations – call on the name of the Lord – and live.

## **The Inconvenient Sign**

### **Acts 2:4-21    (February 2, 2025)**

**Main Point:** Tongues was a sign that God's plan has always been to reach every nation – we must never forget that.

#### **General Questions:**

1. Why was it so hard for Israel to accept that God wanted Gentiles in the church?
2. Why was it so important that God remind Israel that Gentiles are to be a part of the church?
3. Why is the gift of tongues such a divisive topic in churches?
4. Why is God's plan to form one people with one tongue – from the many?
5. How did tongues function in Israel's history to remind them of God's plan? See Deuteronomy 28:49; Jeremiah 5:15 and Isaiah 28:11.
6. How did tongues function in Acts 8, 10 and 19?
7. In Acts 2 – what is the significance of those from the nations hearing the gift of tongues?
8. Why did Peter use the quote from Joel?
9. Why is verse 21 the truly important part of this quotation?
10. What are the truths about tongues we can all agree on?

#### **Application Questions:**

1. How would you personally answer these questions?
  - Is tongues necessary for salvation?
  - Is tongues ever an unknown form of language?
  - Is it ever a missionary aid – communicating on the mission field?
  - Is the gift here today?

How important is this doctrine to you?
2. Is there a lesson for us today regarding the gift of tongues?

3. Are there any groups you struggle to accept as being able to be part of the church?

**What convicted me in the message?**

**What moved me in the message?**

**What will I do in light of the message?**