



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 14:20-25

“Tongues Speaking in the Old Testament?”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the encouragement and comfort that they do give to us. We thank Thee especially for the light concerning our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the light concerning our condition before Thee. We thank Thee for the marvelous atoning work that our Lord is responsible for by his devotion and dedication to the will of God. We thank Thee for the blessings that are ours as a result of what he’s accomplished. We thank Thee for forgiveness of sins. We thank Thee for the presence of the Holy Spirit. We thank Thee for justification; that we have a righteousness that is acceptable to Thee.

We thank Thee for the presence of the Spirit as our guide and as our teacher. And we thank Thee, Lord, for all of the marvelous promises that are ours as a result of the ratification of the New Covenant in the blood shed on Calvary’s cross. We are indeed grateful; we acknowledge, Lord, our total dependence upon Thee. Enable us to understand truly how dependent we are. Give us the desire to be personally, day by day in our daily lives, truly dependent upon Thee and upon Thy grace. Give us understanding of the Scriptures. As we study tonight, may that be our experience.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Well, the subject tonight as we turn again to chapter 14, our chapter on speaking in tongues is “Tongues Speaking in the Old Testament?” Seems strange to think about it, but the apostle appeals to the Old Testament, appeals specifically to Isaiah chapter 28, and there says some things that the apostle draws from that chapter and let’s us know that there was tongue speaking in the Old Testament which, of course, is some help to us in understanding what tongue speaking are -- or is -- in the New Testament. I’m going to read verse 20 through 25 of chapter 14. This is the passage that we’ll be looking at, but we’ll also look at Isaiah chapter 28. We’ll turn to that in the course of the exposition. But now 1 Corinthians chapter 14 in verse 20. The apostle writes,

“Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature. In the law--”

And incidentally, this expression law here is not an unusual usage of the term but sometimes it’s forgotten.

This is a term that in the context here and in other places, too, in the New Testament refers not to the Ten Commandments, though it’s inclusive of Mosaic Law, but it refers to the whole of the Old Testament. There are other passages in the New Testament in which the word has that sense. Largely, it seems, because the passages that are referred to here, in this case Isaiah, are dependent upon the law that is recorded for us in what we know as the first five books of Genesis. So,

“In the law (that is, in the Old Testament) it is written: *‘With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me,’* says the Lord. Therefore tongues are for a sign (the word therefore is not the common word that introduces an inference. It’s the word that often introduces a result clause. We could translate it here ‘so then’ but the sense is very similar, and therefore is not really wrong,

it’s just an unusual rendering for the Greek word at that point). Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe. Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues (Now the apostle does not mean all speak at the same time but that all may from time to time speak in tongues seems to be the sense.) (If all speak with tongues, and there come in *those who are* uninformed or unbelievers (Our translators do not have unanimity in the rendering of these words. The word uninformed particularly because it is a word that simply means something like an outsider but the state of the person’s spiritual condition is not set forth and so it’s difficult to be absolutely certain if these individuals are really part of the church or not.) But our text says) Who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person -- (Now of course, obviously, if everybody was prophesying all at once, then they would say the same thing they just said, “are you not out of your mind?” So it’s clear that he means if all prophesy in the sense that anyone might upon occasion guided by the Holy Spirit prophesy.) But if all prophesy and an unbeliever or any uninformed persons comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.”

Well, 1 Corinthians 14 we know -- I’m sure you know, and I’ve been trying to make it plain, is not an easy chapter. It’s a difficult chapter and the apostle in an age in which the gifts of prophesy and tongues were common has been emphasizing the importance of edification in the church meetings. The thing that stands out is he wants to be sure that those in the church who are engaged in the gifts of utterance remember that edification is the important goal of the gifts and the use of them in the church meetings.

Now, we have contended -- we, that is, I -- I have contended, and I think for good reasons, that tongues were known languages -- not gibberish, not ecstatic speech, but

known languages. The term languages are used later on and even words so that obviously they were languages of some kind. I have assumed that they are known languages and that they are not a criterion of life or service. The reason for that is the statement in chapter 12 where he says, “Not all speak in tongues, do they?” If tongues were necessary for spiritual life, then he would not be able to say all do not speak in tongues, do they? Because he is, by that statement, saying that some will never speak in tongues. They don’t have the gift. So tongues is not a criterion of life or service. It’s an expression of a spiritual gift, and I guess, possibly, in one sense you could say it has to do with service but it’s not the total judge of our service of the Lord.

Now, I don’t want to go over the data because we’ve done it twice. First, two or three weeks ago and then our last study again I went into the reasons why I thought that we are dealing with known languages and not ecstatic speech. So I will not try to do that again. If you have questions about it or you were not here, well, then I suggest you get the tape and listen to the first part of the message last time because I spent about 15 or 20 minutes giving reasons why I think that Paul is talking about known languages. That is, the gift to express truth in a language that an individual has not studied and thus, it would have been regarded as something miraculous and would have been something that would have influenced people surely to the extent, at least, that we ought to listen to what this individual is saying.

I feel for the views of some people that one should not be critical of fellow believers. It’s been necessary to be critical of the Charismatic movement, and I want to say that there are, to my knowledge, a number of individuals – I don’t know the movement well enough to say there are thousands or hundreds of thousands. I wouldn’t be surprised if there were, if there were not hundreds of thousands of people within the Charismatic movement who are genuine Christians. And furthermore, not only genuine Christians but maybe, in a number of cases, more faithful to the Lord than some of us who think we have a little better understanding of what the Scriptures may say about it.

And so it’s difficult to be critical of fellow believers. It’s not always easy to do that. I know some of us like to do that and sometimes all of us like to be a bit critical, but I do feel for those for whom I must criticize. One of the things that the Apostle Paul makes plain to us is that it is necessary to criticize. He criticizes. He is critical in the Epistle to the Corinthians. So there is nothing in criticism itself that is wrong. It’s necessary from time to time. It’s important for us to remember, I think, that truth is more important than a superficial peace.

And so from time to time there is need for someone to stand up and speak what is, in many cases at least, provable to be the word of God. I was looking at a book that John MacArthur wrote some years ago -- 1992, to be exact. And I looked at it. I was astonished when I looked at it because I had read it all the way through, had marked it up, and then I had forgotten a lot of things that were in it.

Now, that’s not Dr. MacArthur’s fault. That’s my fault because I’m forgetful; but I read it through, marked it all up, and then I looked at some of the things that I had written, and I’d actually given a message on it and the notes were there. But I don’t want to get off on that. I just simply want to read something that he said with reference to that point: criticism. He says that he agrees that it’s necessary at times to be critical of those who are our fellow believers. This is what he wrote, “I speak from first-hand knowledge. Our radio broadcast ‘Grace to You’ is heard daily on a network of more than 200 stations. Nearly all of them share our doctrinal perspective and commitment to the absolute, sufficiency of Scripture. And most of them balk at broadcasting series that deal with 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, Acts 2, or Romans 12 -- those are passages that deal with the gifts -- or other passages that confront Charismatic imbalances. Many espouse ministry philosophies explicitly prohibiting any teaching that might challenge the beliefs of their Charismatic constituents.

“One network executive wrote this to me (listen to what the executive of the network wrote to Dr. MacArthur) Please reconsider your policy of dealing with the

Charismatic movement and other controversial topics on your radio broadcasts; though we share your convictions on these issues.” Isn’t that interesting? He claims to really share Dr. MacArthur’s convictions -- “Though we share your convictions on these issues, many of our listeners do not. These people are dear brothers and sisters in Christ and (how does he know that? But any rate) they’re dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and we do not feel it is helpful to the cause of Christ to attack what they believe. We are committed to keeping peace among brethren and unity in the body of Christ. Thank you for being sensitive to these concerns.”

That’s most interesting, because it’s clear that peace is more important than truth for him. He acknowledges, he believes what Dr. MacArthur speaks. He believes it’s Scriptural, obviously. But he doesn’t want to talk about it because it might upset some who do not agree. How are those people who do not agree ever going to find further light, further information if this is not done?

So now the apostle turns to verse 20 and says,

“Brethren (now I think this exhortation in verse 20 to maturity is very interesting) Brethren, do not be children in understanding; in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.”

Over concentration on glossolalia, speaking in tongues – Over-concentration on glossolalia is a mark of immaturity; so Donald Carson says in one of his chapters on this point. I think that that is absolutely in harmony with what Paul is saying in this chapter. He tells them that to overemphasize glossolalia is to be immature in the things of the word of God.

So, brethren, and that word reminds those to whom he’s writing of the dignity of their position. They are brethren; they are members of the body of Christ; they are members of the family of God, and so they are brethren. And the sisters are included,

too; just didn’t want to write brethren and sisters. Brethren, so brethren – it reminds us of the fact that we are united in one family. Brethren, the Charismatic believers, the non-charismatic believers, they belong to the same family. That’s important for us to remember. But as we speak to each other frankly in the ordinary affairs of life. Martha is critical of me every now and then. I rarely am critical of her; but nevertheless, there is a place for criticism in the family, isn’t there? I don’t look forward to it, but nevertheless, it does me good. Keep it up Martha.

And in the family of God, it’s the same way. We should remember we are members of the same family, and we’re helped by criticism that is true to the word of God. And to say brethren reminds us of our oneness in the family of God and also reminds us of the dignity of our position. We are brothers in the family of God.

Now, he incites or urges these brethren to be what he calls perfect, mature in understanding; “In malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.” What are the characteristics of children? Because he’s used two words here. He says don’t be children then he says in malice be babes. Now, the babes are those little children that are so dependent upon us. The *paedia*, the children, they are a little older. So he looks at the family of God and tells us that we’re brethren, we are to be babies in malice; that is very little of the malice but we are to be children -- in understanding, we are to be mature; we are not to be children in our understanding. So don’t be babes, don’t be children.

What are the characteristics of children? Well, we were discussing this at home. Children prefer the show, the glittery kinds of things; children love Christmas because it’s filled with glitter. So children like the glitter. They like the showy. They prefer the showy to the useful. That’s true in spiritual things, too. There are people who like the showy and the glittery rather than the useful.

Children are most interesting, and every Christmas we usually take the grandchildren out for a ride to see the lights. They’re all impressed. All were very impressed. And they would express -- on this particular trip, they expressed the fact of

their liking of this tree and that, and how amazed in awe they were. And finally Joseph who was about a year and a half at the time, I think -- Joseph Mayo, Martha’s grandchild, was sitting in the car, and I think he was just having enough of the children saying, “That’s marvelous. That’s great. That’s marvelous.” He said, “For me, I like the concrete.” They were saying, “I love that.” He said, “I love concrete.” [Laughter]

Well, now, he was a rare child at that point; a babe. Children like the glittery. They like the showy. They prefer that to the useful. They like the amusing; they prefer that to the enlightening. If you want to have a child respond to you, make all kinds of foolish faces at them, do all kinds of foolish things. They love that.

Now, the apostle uses that with reference to the believers and tells us not to be babes, not to be children. Furthermore, children and babes are very selfish. Have you noticed that? A child comes in with a new toy and if there are other children around, pretty soon, they’ll want the toy. They’ll try to get the toy. And pretty soon, they’ll have the toy. And then there will be a little scrap over who’s to have the toy which belongs to one person. That’s true in the church; the same kind of thing happens. They are poor in concentration, they’re careless, they’re irresponsible, they’re often cruel -- cruel to one another, both in deeds and in words. All of these things are characteristic of children. They all have their application to the Christian church. Just think about it. Go home tonight and think about it, and you’ll understand why Paul says, “Don’t be children in understanding; in malice be babes, in understanding be mature.”

Plato once said, “Of all the animals, the boy is the most unmanageable.” Isn’t that interesting? Of all the animals, the boy is the most unmanageable. There’s nothing wrong with teenagers. Someone has said that reasoning with them won’t aggravate. So the apostle’s exhortation has application to our daily lives. Be mature; that’s the word that means normally to be perfect; so that is to be mature in the sense of being brought to full growth. In the Christian life, that’s the goal for all of us: to ultimately reach maturity so that it can be said of us, he or she is a mature Christian. We all know them. They stand

out. We have some in Believers Chapel that we can look to and say, He’s a mature Christian. He has a knowledge of the Scriptures. His Christian life, it is advanced, it’s in harmony with the Scriptures, it’s not perfect, he makes mistakes but nevertheless, there’s a level of spiritual growth there.

The apostle says in other places that that’s what he would like to do for each one of us by the ministry that he had. For example, in Colossians chapter 1 in verse 28, he expresses some things with reference to this. Speaking about Jesus Christ he says, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” That was Paul’s goal: to teach and preach in such a way that those who listen to his word, responded to it, might become mature in the Christian life. So I’m not surprised that he should write here, “Brethren, don’t be children in understanding; in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.”

Now, verse 21 follows without any kind of indication of the connection. The apostle just says, “In the law it is written.” The quotation -- I won’t deal with the details of it. It’s a quotation that differs a bit from the Greek Old Testament. It also differs a bit from the Hebrew Old Testament. It’s found in a context of judgment. And I’d like for you to turn back to Isaiah chapter 28 and I want to read these verses. But I’m going to do something that I don’t normally do and that is, I’m going to read from the New International Version because there are a few things in connection with this particular passage that I think are rendered more effectively in the New International Version than the version that I have been reading.

So Isaiah chapter 28, this is from the part of Isaiah that is called the Book of Woes. That is, there are a number of woes that the prophet expresses with reference to various things. And it has been also called the Book of the Precious Cornerstone because of the text that we’ll read in just a moment in verse 16 where the apostle refers to Jesus Christ as a cornerstone. This is a passage that follows what has been going on in Isaiah’s day in Israel and Judah -- Judah particularly. The Assyrians are coming down from the north --

it’s around 700 B.C., to speak very generally -- the Assyrians are coming down from the north. The children of Israel are very concerned over what is happening. They are coming down in judgment upon Israel at the Father’s will because they have turned away from the truth of God.

And so, in order to meet the threat of the Assyrians who are coming from the north, they do just precisely what they ought not to do. That is, instead of going to the Lord God and falling down upon their faces before him and asking him to forgive them for their waywardness and rebellion against him and for their immorality -- which we’ll read about in a moment -- they decide that the wise thing to do is to make an alliance with Egypt because it would make an alliance with Egypt then Egypt will help us – Egypt will fight the Assyrians for us, and we’ll be delivered from the Assyrians. Precisely what a person should not do in any kind of spiritual difficulty. The thing to do when we are in spiritual difficulty is to turn immediately to the Lord.

So listen to what Isaiah says. He’s going to talk first about Samaria, and then he’s going about Judah.

“Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, on the head of a fertile valley -- that city, the pride of those laid low by wine!

“See, the Lord has one who is powerful and strong. Like a hailstorm and a destructive wind, like a driving rain and a flooding downpour, he will throw it forcefully to the ground.

“That wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, will be trampled underfoot. That fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley, (And the picture is of Samaria sitting on that beautiful hill in the land looking out over the fertile fields around about which God had given them in the land.)

(It) will be like a fig ripe -- he says -- that fading flower set on the head of a fertile valley will be like a fig ripe before the harvest -- as soon as someone sees it, he takes it in his hand, he swallows it.”

The picture is of a person who comes out in the earlier part of the summer. He looks at his fig trees, and he notices that on them is one fig. And so he goes over to it, he takes the fig off of the tree. The figs, of course, come in abundance later. He looks at it. He cannot resist swallowing it. And so he swallows it -- just like I did on my fig trees. Not the present one. The present one is a course of trouble; a course of difficulty; a tree of difficulty between Martha and me because she doesn’t think it’s ever going to have figs and I’ve been nursing it for six or seven years now. I know it will have figs because it did have one. I think that I gave her that one. But I remember that when I did have figs that had -- fig trees that had figs on them, I would go out; and the first figs; it is a temptation to take the fig and eat that first fig. So he’s speaking about the Assyrians who come, and they’re going to see some area like a fig ripe, and they’re going to gobble it up. Now he goes on to say in verse 5,

“In that day the LORD Almighty will be a glorious crown, beautiful wreath the remnant of his people. He will be a spirit of justice him who sits in judgment, source of strength those who turn back the battle at the gate.

“And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: Priests and prophets stagger from beer, are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, stagger when seeing (the) visions, they stumble when rendering decisions. All the tables are covered with vomit. There is not a spot without filth.”

What a picture of the prophets and the priests of Israel who have become so wicked that they are drunkards in the practice of what they are supposed to be doing.

The prophets and the priests -- the prophets who are to give the word of God, staggering about among the people; the priests who are those who observe the sacrificial system, carry out the sacrificial system, staggering from their beer.

Lillian Jones and Franklin Jones were members of Believers Chapel for a number of years. And in my notes on Isaiah, which I looked at -- I had forgotten that she had told me this, but she told us some years ago the story of an Episcopalian Rector in Selma, Alabama, where they're now living, who a few years ago -- this was back in the '60s -- on an Easter morning was so drunk that when he got up to read the Ritual of Easter from the prayer book, he turned instead to the section on the funeral and read that.

Now, I don't know about that. I'm not sure that that man was drunk. He may have looked out over his congregation and saw how unspiritual they were and decided that it was more proper to read the funeral section rather than the other section -- I don't know. But she said that he did it inadvertently because he had been drinking.

Well now, here in this section, let me finish reading because we're going to read some more things here. Verse 5 -- did I read that?

"In that day the LORD Almighty will be a glorious crown, beautiful wreath the remnant of his people. He will be a spirit of justice him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate."

The -- well, I read through that, down through verse 8. Now notice, verse 9: "Who is he trying to teach? Now this is something that he puts in the mouth of the Jewish people -- the Hebrew people. Who is he? That is, Isaiah.

"Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those who were just taken from the breast?"

He is speaking to us, Isaiah is, like we are children. We're not children, so these drunkards are saying.

"For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there."

There are a lot of people who sit in our churches today to think about the preaching that they listen to Sunday after Sunday like that. They are not really interested, and they hear the preacher saying, "Do this and do this and do that and do that," the legalistic kind of preaching that we hear so often is expressed that way, and so they are doing it in mockery. They are sneering at the prophet. "Very well then (Isaiah goes on to say), with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people."

Now, he's talking about the Assyrians. He said that they're going around, staggering around, and they are making all of these little sounds do and do and do and do and this and this, stammering speech because it's effected by the drink that they have been imbibing of. And now the prophet responds, "Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues, God will speak to this people." This is the way they're speaking. They are talking about the prophets in stammering speech because they are drunk, under the influence of their whiskey, God is going to speak to them, and he's going to speak to them in a tongue that they will not understand.

"Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, to whom he said, 'This is the resting place, let the weary rest'; and, 'This is the place of repose' -- for they would not listen. So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; little here, a little there"

Precept, upon precept; so, they scoff at the endless, petty, simplicities of the prophet. The Hebrew is very interesting: *sav sav lasav sav sav lasav, qav laqav qav laqav, ze`eyr sham ze`eyr sham*. The kind of language that sounds staccato, small little

syllables because they’re stammering because of their speech. So they’re mocking the prophet just like when Paul preached in Athens. What did they say about Paul? They said Paul is a babbler. His language to them was just like that. He was a babbler. And when he talked about the resurrection, they said he’s a babbler. The Greek word is the word seed picker. It’s what an Englishman would say, he’s a person who speaks little bits and pieces but he doesn’t put it all together in a rational kind of discourse; so they spoke about Paul that way. So let me read and finish the part of it that we need to finish. In chapter 28 now in verse --let’s see -- verse 14:

“Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scoffers who rule this people in Jerusalem. You boast, ‘We have entered into a covenant with death,’ -- (Now, the covenant with death -- that’s Isaiah’s interpretation of the covenant with Egypt. They think that it will be the means by which they will be saved by the Assyrians. He calls it a covenant of death because they’re not appealing to the Lord God.) You boast, ‘We have entered into a covenant with death, with the grave we have made an agreement. (See, they’re boasting, “The Egyptians will save us when the Assyrians come down. We look to the Egyptians to save us.”

Isaiah says that’s a covenant of death. The one who saves is the Lord God. He’s the one to whom they should be appealing. Incidentally, that’s the word that we always need in our experiences, too. In every experience we have, we turn to the Lord. We look to Him for deliverance. We don’t look for the Egyptians around us to help us out of our difficulties. We turn to the Lord and specifically, when we have disobeyed Him, when we are out of harmony with his word, when we have not followed the truth of God. We don’t look to individuals; we don’t run off to the psychiatrist or the psychologist or to the elders, we look to the Lord. The Lord is the Savior. He’s the one to whom we

should look and the Lord who is the one who has given us the ground of salvation and the gift of Christ. Notice what he goes on to say, When an over -- well --

"You boast, "We have entered into a covenant with death, with the grave we have made an agreement. When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us, for we have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place."

"So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'See, I have laid a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line; hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie, and water will overflow your hiding place. Your covenant with death will be annulled; your agreement with the grave will not stand. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you will be beaten down by it. As often as it comes it will carry you away; morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through."

There is no hope, my Christian friends, outside of a trust in our Lord. So in the difficulties of life, we turn to Him. We don't turn to the Egyptians in order to escape the Assyrians of whom we are afraid because we haven't been turning to him. But what is so marvelous about this is that statement in verse 16. It's our Lord saying, "Look. I have laid a stone in Zion. The New Testament cites this text as a reference to Jesus Christ, more than once. He's the stone. He's the cornerstone. He's the precious cornerstone. Both Paul and Peter make that identification. The Gospels make that identification: a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation. Look, the one who trusts will never be dismayed.

What is so striking about this is that word "I will lay" or "See I lay." In the Hebrew texts in the past time, it's "I have laid." It has been laid. When was it laid? When was the stone laid? Well, anyone who reads Scripture knows that it was laid in eternity past; when the divine plan of salvation was devised by the infinite wisdom of our

triumph God and the stone at that time was determined by divine wisdom to be the Son of God in his saving work.

In history, we know the progress of the Old Testament and the development of the plan of salvation. We know that finally that stone is specifically stated to be of Judah, of Abraham, of David, and specifically, the Son of David whose kingdom shall be forever and ever; obviously, an eternal son because you cannot have an eternal kingdom with an eternal king who’s not an eternal person.

So our Lord Jesus Christ is the stone. You have neglected the stone. You, in Judah, and as a result of your neglect of the stone, it’s necessary now for God to speak to you by the Assyrians. They will speak to you in tongues you do not understand. Their tongues were somewhat similar to Hebrew because Semitic languages they had but they had other little things mixed in with it so that their language sounded exactly like I just read to you -- to them.

It sounded to them, so Franz Dailech says, like Low German, the kind of German that people speak in the various parts of Southern Germany and Switzerland to the language of the books, the language of the schools. Most of us who learned German, learned the language of the schools. But you go into the little places, and they have their little dialects. It’s somewhat like it and you finally can make out the sense of it, but it’s very much like people who talk in various parts of the United States. If you go to North Carolina and go up in the mountains of North Carolina and some of the mountain people there say some very interesting sentences. And you finally recognize what they are and they have – and often they have very, very much to the point, they’ve become humorous and useful, but nevertheless, it’s different. And so here, Isaiah says, “You haven’t listened to the Lord and now you’re going to have to listen to tongues; tongues of the Assyrians.”

Now, of course, as you can see what tongues is for them is not something that is going to be for their good, except ultimately. Tongues is a representation to them of judgment. It is an indication of divine judgment. Speaking in tongues is the tongues of

the Assyrians in this instance and in the New Testament the apostle refers to this passage as a reference to that. He goes on to make some interesting things, statements here. I love the statement in verse 20, “The bed is too short to stretch out on, the blanket is too narrow to wrap around you.” That’s a beautiful description of the kind of truth that is not Biblical truth; the kind of truth in which we often try to depend upon for our own spiritual well being. It’s like the bed that’s too short to stretch out on. It’s like the blanket that’s too narrow to wrap around you.

Now, anyone who is married knows that husbands and wives can relate stories about the covers on the bed and their partner’s habits. I’m not going to go into that. I’m going to read you something, however, that has to do with it. The well-known preacher said many years ago, but back to bedsheets, “The most commonplace things have a way of suggesting spiritual realities and the Bible lover between the sheets has doubtless been reminded more than once of Isaiah’s words, for the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on and the covering narrower than he can wrap himself in it. The prophet has in mind the self-righteous rulers in Jerusalem who scorn the judgment of God. Many an evangelist has made rightly in application to all who trust in schemes of their own devising instead of the sufficiency of Christ. Those schemes are just like a bed that’s too short or like cover that will not completely cover us,” so he says.

Matthew Henry said it for us. “Those who do not build upon Christ as their foundation but rest in a righteousness of their own, will prove in thus to have deceived themselves, they can never be easy, safe, nor warm. The bed is too short, the covering is too narrow, like our first parents’ fig leaves, the shame of their nakedness will still appear.”

And then my friend says, “Any man who has wrestled with an inadequate sheet or covers until he has ended up with both feet and head exposed for all the world like a map of the Earth, with both north and south, frigid and the rest only temperate, will have fresh appreciation for the homely word of the prophet.” Well, that’s really what we put

our -- let ourselves in for when we don’t depend upon the truth of the word of God in the experiences of life.

Now, we have about 15 minutes, and I want to turn back to our passage in 1 Corinthians and make the application of the text that the apostle has been talking about because here he will say things that have to do with speaking in tongues. In verse 21 of 14,

“In the law it is written:

‘With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me.’”

The Assyrians who are coming in judgment is the use in context in Isaiah chapter 28. We’ve seen that. So now, Paul draws the conclusion. He says, therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers (like those in Judah who wanted to depend on Egypt instead of depending on the Lord who had laid the foundation for spiritual blessing in the stone who was to come, the Son of David, who ultimately would be the ground of our eternal salvation.

Tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers. When the Assyrians came and they spoke those strange tongues as they conquered Judah, these words from the prophet must have come back to some of the people, and they were saying, Isaiah was right. Those who speak in unknown tongues have now come down and we are their captives. So, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.”

In other words, what we’re talking about here, essentially, is to say that tongues are a sign of divine judgment. This is the most explicit indication of the purpose of tongues in the chapter, and the most explicit statement of the importance and meaning of tongues in the New Testament. What is, then, speaking in tongues? The miracle occurred

on the Day of Pentecost when at the coming of the Holy Spirit, suddenly individuals began to speak in tongues. And it was stated, those individuals, we hear people speaking in our own language. How has this come about? It was a miracle. It was a work of the Holy Spirit. What was the purpose of it? It was to make plain that the nation to whom our Lord had come which has now rejected him stands under divine judgment.

That’s precisely what tongues are. Tongues are not for believers. Tongues are a sign of unbelief. And so the coming of the speaking of tongues on the Day of Pentecost - I want to put it in a scholarly way, was a *haus geschichte* sign. That is, a sign that reflects the history of divine salvation. It was a once-and-for-all event when the Holy Spirit came in harmony with the Old Testament Scriptures, but came and thus, in coming, Israel haven’t rejected our Lord and now the gospel being responded to by the Gentiles, is the great event that signifies God’s judgment against those who have crucified the son of God, a rejection of those who have rejected Him who have violated the covenant that God had made with them.

Back in Deuteronomy chapter 28, verse 48, 49, and verse 50, there is a text that bears on this, as well. This is the passage that you may remember that was very important in the life of the children of Israel. In Deuteronomy 28, verse 49 and verse 50, God is outlining through Moses the things that are going to happen to them when they have become disobedient. We read in verse 49 of Deuteronomy 28,

“The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, *as swift* as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young.”

It is God’s divine judgment upon the children of Israel for their rejection of the Son of God.

Now the Lord Jesus warned about this. He warned about it, told parables about it. I’m going to read one of them for you because I think it’s important to put this together. In Matthew chapter 21 in verse 33, listen to our Lord speaking.

“Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. (These are the prophets who came to Israel; Isaiah one of them.) Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’ So they took him and cast *him* out of the vineyard and killed *him*. ‘Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?’ They said to Him, ‘He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease *his* vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.’ Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’

‘Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whosoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.’ Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.”

So tongues are not a sign for believers. They’re a sign for unbelievers. Now, one might say, “What? They would speak in tongues in Corinth, Corinth, where the church

was.” Yes, that’s true, but what about Corinth? What was characteristic of Corinth? It was a hotbed of Jewish people, some in the church, we know. Read first -- read Acts in chapter 18 and you’ll discover, as well as 2 Corinthians, that the Judaizing party was very active in Corinth, and so the speaking in tongues in Corinth probably -- and underline probably -- probably had reference to the fact that there were Jewish people in the congregation of the church in Corinth who needed to be reminded of the purpose of speaking in tongues; for they were treating them in a different light. So the apostle says,

“Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.”

The question of prophecy -- and I have just a moment to say something about this -- what tongues cannot do, prophecy can. One of the marvelous things about prophecy -- and he’s defined prophecy, you know, back in chapter 14 in verse 3, “He who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.”

Prophecy is for the believers. Prophecy is directed toward those who may be responsive to the word of God. Prophecy is the kind of thing, according to our statement here, when it comes, the individual “is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on *his* face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.” Prophecy is the means by which God produces a sudden, penetrating illumination.

You can see it in the Old Testament when the word of God is spoken by the prophet what a difference it makes. I wish I had time to talk about Gehazi, Elisha’s helper, and how God spoke through Elisha to Gehazi and spoke immediate judgment to him. But when you turn to the New Testament, you will see that our Lord speaks in the same way to the people with whom he comes in contact. The word of God has its effect. Nathaniel, Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward and said to him, “Behold an Israelite,

indeed in whom is no deceit.” Nathaniel said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Phillip called you when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathaniel answered and said to him, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.’ That’s the way the word of God works in the heart of men. There is that sudden penetration by the Holy Spirit that comes through the preaching of the word of God and an individual realizes I’m lost. Christ is my only hope. Lord, save me. Jesus answered, Nathaniel said, “Because I said to you I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You’ll see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Most assuredly I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Tongues, then, is the judicial sign of severance. First used with the nation at the Assyrian invasion, then at Pentecost, and then at least in Corinth to point out that God is speaking to unbelievers. He was speaking to unbelieving Judah. And the Assyrians came and spoke tongues. It was a sign of judgment. On Pentecost, he was speaking to unbelieving Israel and so the Spirit came and worked in the hearts of the thousands there who were converted to the Lord and the nation Israel began its long period of time in which they stand out of covenantal favor because of the crucifixion of the Messiah who was sent to them. The stone, the precious cornerstone that they have rejected but will one day ultimately accept again. Hallelujah to think about it.

Let’s not neglect the triad stone, the precious cornerstone, the sure foundation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There’s no better time to come to Him than right now. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous words of instruction reminding us of that that has transpired in the past and how it affects us today intimately here in Believers Chapel or wherever the word of God is proclaimed. Oh God, cause us to turn to Thee, to turn to the triad stone, the precious cornerstone, the Davidic son who has made it possible for us to have forgiveness of sins forever. At this very moment, Lord,

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touch hearts. If there are those in the audience who have not come to Christ, may they come right now.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.