

The Gift of Tongues

Some Experiences in the History of the Advent Movement.

In this article we shall describe how the gift has been manifested at times in the experience of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We saw how the Spirit of God manifested Himself in various ways when the gifts were originally given. Think of "miracles" (1 Cor. 12:10), of "healing" (1 Cor. 12:9), and other remarkable gifts. To some were given, by the Holy Spirit, the gift of "faith" (1 Cor. 12:9). This must have been a faith out of the ordinary, for every believer in Christ must exercise faith in Jesus to enjoy the blessings of salvation. But the "faith" mentioned as a gift of the Spirit would be seen in the casting out of evil spirits, in healing the sick, and in numerous other ways. Of course, we need to be on our guard in these matters, for there is nothing the enemy of truth would like to do more than to start a wave of fanaticism among our people. He is expert in imitating, as far as he can, the work of God, and he can perform what seem to us to be miracles. He did so through the magicians of Pharaoh centuries ago; he is doing so today through spiritism and other occult channels. It is clear from the Biblical record that he can afflict with disease (Luke 13: 13, 16); he can torment individuals with devils (Luke 10:17, 18). And it would seem from the counsel of the apostle in 1 Corinthians 14 that he cares, when he sees it is to his advantage, imitate a gift of tongues. That he has done so is clear as one studies what has purported to be the "gift of tongues" throughout the history of the church.

That there have been genuine manifestations of this gift we have no doubt, but when God gives such a gift we may rest assured that it will serve a distinct and definite purpose in witnessing for the saving truth of the gospel to some soul or to groups.

In this connection let us consider the following:

I. The Manifestation of Other Gifts of the Spirit Among God's Remnant

What a wonderful and encouraging story it would make if we could gather from the ends of the earth testimonies of the many times God through His servants has cast out devils from those who were possessed. Some of our ministers have had many such experiences, but we cannot enumerate them. A partial list with references will be seen in the footnote.¹ Think also of the many persons in our ranks who have been miraculously healed in answer to prayer, following the counsel given in James 5. This is an important challenge, and perhaps the most solemn one, to the minister of God. The laying on of hands, the anointing and the prayer for the sick, call for deep heart searching on the part of both patient and minister. Sometimes God heals slowly by natural means; at other times He heals instantaneously and miraculously. We have often seen this happen. and what a wonderful blessing it is, not only to the person concerned but also to those taking part in the service and to the whole church. God still answers the prayer of faith.¹

Then think also of the many occasions when God has wrought deliverance from devastating pests. Time and again this has happened, not only overseas but here in the United States. While stark desolation has been left in the wake of these hordes of insects, the area of the Adventist church member has so often been divinely protected, and for a long time was a standing illustration to all for miles around of what God does for those who trust in Him.¹

It should now be mentioned that during the decades there have been a number of manifestations of the gift of tongues in the Adventist Church around the world. In giving

study to this we should bear in mind that reading and writing are far more widespread in some areas than in the days of the apostles. Furthermore, the art of printing came in during comparatively recent decades. In the days of our Lord every scroll had to be laboriously written by hand; now the printing presses turn out books and magazines by the million in most languages of earth. Then, too, we have special facilities for learning languages, facilities such as the generations before us never dreamed. Consequently, the need for the gift of tongues today would largely be in cases of emergency. Ellen G. White gave counsel concerning our young men in the learning of languages:

It may in some cases be necessary that young men learn foreign languages. This they can do with most success by associating with the people, at the same time devoting a portion of each day to studying the *language*.—*Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, pp. 515, 516. Familiarity with the languages of the different nations is a help in missionary work.—*Ibid.*, p. 518.

II. *Manifestation of the Gift of Tongues in the Advent Movement*

1. *In the Millerite Movement.*

There may have been several instances, but we refer to only one. It occurred at a camp meeting in Litchfield, Connecticut, in 1844. We read:

In a report of the camp meeting held at Litchfield, Connecticut, it seems that much opposition was manifested toward those who were awaiting the coming of the Lord, and actual damage was done to the erection on the camp grounds. The report then tells that "we . . . continued as long as we intended; not a hair of our heads was hurt; we had victory in the name of our Master; God, in mercy, healed the sick, and caused a dear child to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave him utterance, insomuch that we marveled and said, 'Let God work in His own way.'"—*The Midnight Cry*, Oct. 3, 1844, Vol. VII, No. 13, p. 103, col. 3.

2. *In Our Earlier Years.*

a. The experience of Brother Ralph.

This took place at a conference held at Centreport, New York, in November, 1849, and the details can be read in several publications.'

The story as given in one of our early accessible publications reads as follows:

At the close of the Centreport Conference, I introduced Bro. Rhodes' case to Bro. Ralph. When I first saw Bro. Ralph I had an impression that we had a work to do . . . ; and he has since told me that he had the same impression. We both felt deeply Bro. Rhodes' case, and in the evening some half dozen of *us* had a season of prayer over the subject. Bro. Ralph asked the Lord, in secret, to pour out His Spirit upon us if it was His will that we should go after Bro. Rhodes. The Spirit was poured out, and it settled upon us, so that the place was awful, and glorious. While I was inquiring of the Lord if He had sent His servant so far to go with me to hunt up Bro. Rhodes, [at] that moment Bro. Rhodes broke out in a new tongue, unknown to us all. Then came the interpretation—"Yes to go with thee." 4

b. The experience at Chippewa Falls, Massachusetts, 1851.

This refers to a manifestation at the time of an ordination service. The following is the story:

With adoring love and gratitude to the most high God, we would acknowledge his goodness and mercy to us. For some time past he has been granting us the deep searchings of his Holy Spirit, with true humiliation of soul before him, and recently has sent, and abundantly blessed the labors of his servant, Bro. Holt, among us. After baptizing six of our number, our dear Bro. Morse was set apart by the laying on of hands. . . The Holy Ghost witnessed by the gift of tongues, and solemn manifestations of the presence and power of God.—*Review and Herald*, August 19, 1851, p. 15.

These experiences, during the Millerite movement, the cases at Newport, Massachusetts, are all practically in the same category. In the first and the third, mention is made of the gift of tongues, but there is no word of what was spoken or the particular purpose for which the gift was manifested. In the case of Brother Ralph it was a case of divine guidance, giving counsel as to what to do under certain circumstances.

III. *In Our Later Years*

The experiences to which we shall refer fall into different groups and we shall list them accordingly.

I. Messages given in a language not known by the speaker.

We shall list two such instances, and they come nearest to the gift the apostles received at Pentecost.

a. The instances in Calumet, Massachusetts, in 1919.

One of our ministers usually spoke through a translator at a Portuguese church, but had learned a few words of Portuguese. One Sabbath, God gave him freedom, and he tells his own experience as follows:

With my limited knowledge of Portuguese, it was like carefully trying to pour out my message through the neck of a bottle. Under the circumstances there was no flexibility to change the message, which I would have done were I to speak in English. It was with fear and trembling that I decided to go ahead with my subject as planned. . . . Upon launching upon my discourse . . . I immediately felt a freedom and liberty with the Portuguese language as I did with the English. Without any mental effort more than in English, the words and expressions and grammar came clear and connected, and without any hesitation the Lord gave me the facility to communicate to the people the message for the hour, in their own tongue. When the service was over, the visitors said that it was difficult for them to believe I was not a Portuguese, stating that they understood everything perfectly and clearly, and that my language was correct and the message true. (From a letter written to the late T. H. Jemison, Sept. 16, 1953, and on file at the Ministerial Association office, Washington, D.C.)

b. An instance in India, sometime prior to 1954.

A government official was convicted concerning our message and knowing that to accept would have serious consequences to him and his family, he prayed for light as to how he should act. The story is:

As the postal inspector prayed one night, he asked God to send this overseas evangelist to him the next day, urging him to keep the Sabbath, but this invitation to obey God and

keep the Sabbath was to be in his dialect. If this was done he would know that God was directing him and would accept it as a sure sign.

The next morning, even before this government worker had left his home for work, the overseas worker came to his home. God had impressed him that he should call on this man, and although they conversed back and forth through a translator, it was not until he was ready to leave that the evangelist found himself speaking in an unknown language, but which seemed to bring a great deal of help to this government inspector. The eight words that he said in this unknown dialect, but which were very clear to the government inspector, were these, "Jesus loves you. He needs you. Come away."

—Reported by J. E. Edwards in a statement made in writing, July 30, 1954. This is also on file at the Ministerial Association.

2. Message given in the speaker's mother tongue but understood by the listener in his own language.

a. Instance at Hanford, California, in 1904. (Preached in English—understood in German.) Ellen G. White did not speak in other tongues. I think of an experience that took place about the year 1904, when she was at Hanford, California, and spoke at a camp meeting. At this meeting there was someone recently from Germany who had been persuaded to attend the camp meeting by an Adventist neighbor. After Mrs. White's sermon, the non-Adventist turned to the one who had brought them to the camp meeting and commented that it was a wonderful sermon. This person was very much surprised to learn that Mrs. White did not speak German, for the sermon had been heard in the German language. Mrs. White, of course, did not know German She had spoken in English. —Quoted from a letter written by A. L. White to an inquirer. It is on file in the White Estate Office, Washington, D.C.

b. Instance in Singapore Mission, 1926-1931. (Preached in Malay—understood in Chinese.)

A young Batak worker of Sumatra was holding evangelistic meetings in a town in the Johore state, which was a part of my field. He told me that his congregation was composed of Malays (Mohammedans), Chinese, and some English-speaking nationals, totaling about 100 people. After one of his studies one evening, the Chinese who attended asked him where and when he had studied Chinese. He said, "I have never studied Chinese. I have been preaching in Malay." They then said, "We heard you in our own tongue." Their tongue consisted of three dialects—Hakka, Cantonese, Teacheow. According to the worker, this manifestation was repeated.

I mentioned this experience to our superintendent. He called the worker and questioned him. The worker maintained its veracity. I, for one, did not doubt the truth of the experience, for during that period of service we saw many miraculous divine leadings and divine healings. —From a letter written by W. W. R. Lake to the author on Oct. 12, 1954, which is now on file at the Ministerial Association.

c. Instance in a town in South Africa, prior to 1954. (Preached in Afrikaans—understood in Spanish.)

One of our ministers conducted an Afrikaans effort in a certain town. One night he spoke on the subject of the great judgment day. After presenting the subject he stood by the door of the tent shaking hands with the people as they went out. A certain woman, who came to

the meetings for the first time and sat at the back of the tent, held his hand and spoke to him in a tongue he could not understand. As he did not understand a word of what she was saying, he spoke to her in English instead of Afrikaans. Then, in very broken English, she said, "I am glad you spoke in my mother tongue tonight so that I could understand you." He then said, "But I spoke in Afrikaans." She said, "No, you did not. I cannot understand one word in Afrikaans. I am from Spain, and I am leaving again tomorrow for Spain. You spoke in fluent Spanish, and I understood every word you said. You spoke on the judgment day, did you not?" . . . He insisted that he preached in Afrikaans, and she insisted he spoke in Spanish. Our brother then believed that the Holy Spirit interpreted the message to this woman in Spanish. —From a letter to the author by A. C. LeButt of Cape Town, South Africa, Sept. 9, 1954.

d. Instance in Newark, New Jersey, in 1946. (Preached in English—understood in one of the languages of Czechoslovakia.)

In the spring of 1946 while I was working in the New Jersey Conference I was asked to go to Newark and meet with the Czechoslovakian church in the interests of the Ingathering campaign. . . . It is what happened on the fifth Sabbath that I want to tell you about. All the older members could understand and follow the sermon. However, there was one sister who could not understand a word I said. The only way that she got anything out of the service was when one of her friends took down the texts and a few of the thoughts, and then in the afternoon the two of them would go over these notes together in her home. This Sabbath, at the close of the service, she said to me through her friend, "Elder McComas, I understood every word you said today." Her friend and I . . . were greatly surprised to learn of what had taken place. The local elder and several others were standing by, and all were happily surprised; . . . I called their attention to the fact that the gift of tongues had been manifested that Sabbath, yet none knew about it until all was over. Evidently the thoughts presented that Sabbath morning were just what the Lord wanted that dear sister to have, and He changed the words after they left my mouth and before they got into her ear, for I cannot speak a word of Czechoslovakian, nor understand it either. —From a letter written by K. M. McComas to the author, Aug. 25, 1954,

e. Instance in Teheran, Persia, in the early days of our work. (Preached in Turkish — translated into Russian by worker who did not understand Turkish.)

While the workers were busily engaged in building up the church, an unexpected language difficulty arose when the shah ruled that Persian should be the first language of the country. (Turkish was also permitted since it was spoken in all the northern provinces.) God helped His servants to meet this emergency in a remarkable way. Before this, there had been no problem; because Michael had preached directly in the Russian. Now the brethren thought it best to use the Russian only through a translator. Michael did not know the Turkish language in which Brother Oster preached, and from which it was necessary to give the translation. However, at the time of the sermon God gave Michael the ability to understand the language. It made no difference which dialect was being used—whether it was Brother Oster preaching in the Azerbaijani, or Brother Ashod speaking in the Istanbul Turkish—Michael was able to make a clear translation into the Russian. In this way they continued their work for a year, at the end of which time a group of eight was baptized and a church organized.

Not until afterward, when Michael took up the study of Turkish, did he fully appreciate the miracle the Lord had wrought for them in time of need.—DANIEL V. KUBROCK, *Light Through the Shadows*, pp. 137, 138.

f. Message given in English, but a few sentences spoken in another language not known to the speaker.

Some years ago, Elder H. J. Edmed, when in London in charge of the work in the northern part of the metropolis, told me of an experience he had one Sabbath morning in connection with the North London church. It appears that three Chinese sailors were roaming around the city that morning, and their attention was arrested by the singing they heard when passing our church. They decided to make their way into the building where Elder Edmed was speaking.

These men understood but one form of the Chinese language. Elder Edmed did not know they were there. He preached that morning, and, seemingly without his knowledge, he uttered four or five sentences in the Chinese language which these three seamen understood.

When Elder Edmed was shaking hands with the people as they left the church, the three Chinese came up, all smiles and happy, and thanked him for speaking to them in their own language. It happened that one of our missionaries from China was in the meeting that morning, and it was only when he mentioned this to Elder Edmed that the latter was conscious of the fact at all.

Now here is an instance where the Lord evidently wanted to reach the hearts of those three Chinese, and so, through His servant, gave a very brief message in the language they understood.—Submitted by the writer, copy of the item on file at the office of the Ministerial Association, Washington, D.C.

g. Message understood in Italian, a young man reading one of our books in English, but which he understood in his own language.

A good many years ago, in California, a young man named Oberti resided there. He was an ardent son of the Roman Catholic Church and had come to America from Italy to make his fortune. A canvasser one day sold him *The Great Controversy*. When the book was delivered, Oberti, who did not know how to read English, wondered why he had ordered the book, but in good faith, he took the book, placed it in his cabin, and went on with his work on the cherry trees. After his evening meal he thought that, although he couldn't read the book, he might look at the illustrations. He opened the book and without thinking began to read the first chapter. When he turned the page, he came to himself and was a bit amused that he was reading English. From that time on, Oberti was able to read the English language. He became a Seventh-day Adventist and for many years served as the elder of our Napa church. I know him very well and he told me that story.

—Quoted from a letter written by A. L. White to an inquirer.

Ellen G. White has cautioned God's people through the years against the perversions seen on every hand of the so-called gift of tongues. (See *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 411-414, 418, 419.) And yet she has recognized that what God did at Pentecost, He will repeat before the closing up of the work of God on earth. We will do well to ponder these excerpts.

There is a great work to be done. The world will not be converted by the gift of tongues, or by the working of miracles, but by preaching Christ *crucified*.—*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 424.

I look forward to the time when the events of the day of Pentecost shall be repeated with even greater power than on that occasion. John says, "I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory." Then, as at the Pentecostal season, the people will hear the truth spoken to them, every man in his own tongue. God can breathe new life into every soul that sincerely desires to serve Him, and can touch the lips with a live coal from off the altar, and cause them to become eloquent with His praise. Thousands of voices will be imbued with the power to speak for the wonderful truths of God's word. The stammering tongue will be unloosed, and the timid will be made strong to bear courageous testimony to the truth. May the Lord help His people to cleanse the soul temple from every defilement, and to maintain such a close connection with Him that they may be partakers of the latter rain when it shall be poured out.—Ellen G. White in *Review and Herald*, July 20, 1886, p. 450.

"It is with an earnest longing that I look forward to the time when the events of the day of Pentecost shall be repeated with even greater power than on that occasion. . . . Then, as at the Pentecostal season, the people will hear the truth spoken to them, every man in his own tongue."—The *SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments on Acts 2:1-4, p. 1055.

May God speed that day, and may we all be ready to receive the outpouring of the latter rain.

A young girl in Haiti, *Review and Herald*, Oct. 9, 1958, p. 19. A girl in Lana, North Nigeria, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 16, 1961, p. 19. A family in Oruro, Bolivia, *Review and Herald*, June 1, 1961, p. 16. Woman in Salvador, Brazil, *Review and Herald*, Oct. 24, 1963, p. 15. Men and women in Haiti, *Missions Quarterly*, Oct. 2, 1947, April 19, p. 78. Individuals in the South Sea Islands, C. H. Watson, *Cannibals and Headhunters in South Seas*, pp. 198, 271, 272.

Several instances of healing are recorded in the following places:

Elder James White at Centerport, N.Y., in 1850, —*Life Sketches*, pp. 136-139. A young man in Mill Grove, Michigan, *Review and Herald*, May 14, 1861, p. 204. A sister in Lovetts' Grove, Ohio, *Review and Herald*, March 10, 1859, p. 127. A prominent leader in the General Conference, *Review and Herald*, May 22, 1866, p. 198. A man in Torreón, Mexico, *Review and Herald*, Aug. 8, 1940, p. 13. A leader in the work in U.S.A., *Review and Herald*, Dec. 14, 1944, p. 17. A man in Bechuanaland, South Africa, *Review and Herald*, May 20, 1948, p. 16.

Examples of deliverance from disaster:

Plague of crickets in Boise, Idaho, *Review and Herald*, April 16, 1964, p. 7. Plague of grasshoppers in Parana, Brazil, *Review and Herald*, April 18, 1963, p. 19. Plague of rabbits in California, *Review and Herald*, Aug. 17, 1961, p. 12. Raging fire sweeping over wheat fields in Australia, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 21, 1963, p. 11.

For further experiences see *God's Gold in My Hand*, by D. E. Rebok, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1959, also *Dark Sunrise*, by Joyce Rochat, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958.

In the *Present Truth*, vol. 1, no. 5, December, 1849, pp. 34-36. "The Gift of Tongues in Early Advent History," by D. A. Robinson, p. 7, E. G. W. Trustees.

"Facsimile of Two Earliest SDA Periodicals"—pp. 34, 35.