

Ask the Rabbi

Submitted Question #9:

Rabbi, in our congregation the head rabbi and the assistant both come out of the Assembly of God. So, of course, they advocate speaking in tongues. What is your position on this doctrine? Mine is that it was an actual spoken language, and everyone heard what was spoken in his own national language. It is not a heavenly secret language for us to communicate with *Adonai*. Please feel free to agree or disagree with me. I welcome Scripture. I want His truth not man's.

The Rabbi's Answer

Ohev Yisrael Messianic Jewish Congregation believes that the gift of tongues is legitimate and that it can be manifested either by speaking in a known language that is not our own or speaking in a language that is unknown. I realize that the example in Acts is where the languages spoken were known languages, but my experience is that it can be otherwise as well. The Scripture I rely on to say this is 1 Corinthians 14:1-4 and verse 2 in particular:

“Pursue love! However, keep on eagerly seeking the things of the Spirit; and especially seek to be able to prophesy. ² For someone speaking in a tongue is not speaking to people but to God, because no one can understand, since he is uttering mysteries in the power of the Spirit. ³ But someone prophesying is speaking to people, edifying, encouraging and comforting them. ⁴ A person speaking in a tongue does edify himself, but a person prophesying edifies the congregation.”

There are three uses for tongues. The first is when God moves us to prophesy in tongues in the hearing of others. In that case it requires an interpretation or else there is no purpose for it. The second use is as a means to pray privately for something when we do not know how God wants us to pray. The third is to edify ourselves. We glean this from 1 Corinthians 14:4:

“A person speaking in a tongue does edify himself, but a person prophesying edifies the congregation.”

It is my opinion that “tongues” is a gift that not everyone has. When it is first noticed, it is often on the occasion of a powerful and supernatural filling of the Holy Spirit (baptism of the Holy Spirit), but not always. It is also possible that a person has the gift but suppresses it through either fear or unbelief in its legitimacy.

Messianic Judaism is similar to the Christian church in that some congregations consider themselves charismatic in regard to the gifts of the Spirit and some do not. However, even when a Messianic Jewish congregation is charismatic, one rarely hears a message given in tongues publicly because it is unknown in the wider Jewish world and would tend to shock Jewish visitors into believing that they were not in “Jewish space.” Nevertheless, it occasionally happens and, when it does, we expect an interpretation to be given, and the elders consider it

their responsibility to discern whether the message and the interpretation are legitimately from God.

Tongues is not the only gift in which we at Ohev Yisrael believe. We believe that all of the gifts mentioned in the Bible are for today and, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic when we conducted longer services, we routinely invited members to share Words that they believed were from the Lord and meant for the community. The elders judged all Words given and, on rare occasions, have rendered an affirmation or have had to render an addition, an adjustment, or a rebuke.