



Walking with the Spirit through the Book of Acts

Pastor Michael Cranford

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Schedule

April 7	The Holy Spirit
April 14	Acts 1:1-9
April 21	Acts 1:10-26
April 28	Acts 2:1-47
May 5	Acts 3
May 12	BREAK (Mother's Day)
May 19	Acts 4



Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

1. What happened at Pentecost was a fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the coming of the Spirit, after his departure.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4; NIV)



Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

2. The unique characteristics of this event suggest this is not the normal experience of people who receive the Holy Spirit. Rather, it seems a deliberate sign to ensure that the start of the church is framed with unmistakable meaning.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. (Acts 2:2-3)



Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

- a) The Spirit is given in a way that is unmistakably supernatural but with a clear manifestation in the physical realm. Whatever it means, possessing the Spirit, it has power and significance in the real (physical) world.

Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. (Acts 16:16-19)

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b) Having tongues accompany this brings the unmistakable message that the work of the Spirit is intended for the entire world, not just Jews in Palestine.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. (Rom 1:16)

- Power of God
- Salvation
- By faith (not ethnicity)

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c) The use of tongues typifies the idea that the work of the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to spread a message. This is not power for its own sake, but to complete a mission that was started by Jesus. Average, everyday people are now empowered for the same kind of ministry: to deliver the same message of the kingdom.

At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because **that is why I was sent.**" And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. (Luke 4:42-44)

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

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d) The work of the Spirit comes in direct fulfillment of not only Jesus' promises, but other Old Testament prophecies of the final age leading to the kingdom (see Acts 2:17-21). This event, therefore, connects the past to the present, and the present to the future. The same Spirit who begins this age will end it. The final age (leading to judgment and the kingdom) is upon us.

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, **I will pour out my Spirit on all people.** Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.'" (Acts 2:14-17)

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- e) The use of tongues and flames of fire shows that the work is deliberately individualized, though the work itself is for all of us. Each person has the same power but not necessarily the same words.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. (1 Cor 12:12-14)



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f) Fire is prophetically associated by John in connection with the kind of baptism that Jesus was bringing (Luke 3:16). The nearest reference that indicates the significance of fire seems to be Jesus' teaching in Luke 12. Fire represents purification and refinement. His people therefore have this as a component in their ministry.

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!” (Luke 12:49-50)



Pentecost, speaking in tongues, tongues of fire: The Spirit's power and baptism

g) The scene at Pentecost is radically different than anything seen in the Old Testament and signifies a power never before seen on earth. A full understanding of what it means is not yet evident but becomes increasingly so through the book of Acts.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.
(Luke 4:1)

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:4)

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power. (1 Cor 2:4-5)

Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. (Gen 11:1-5)



Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

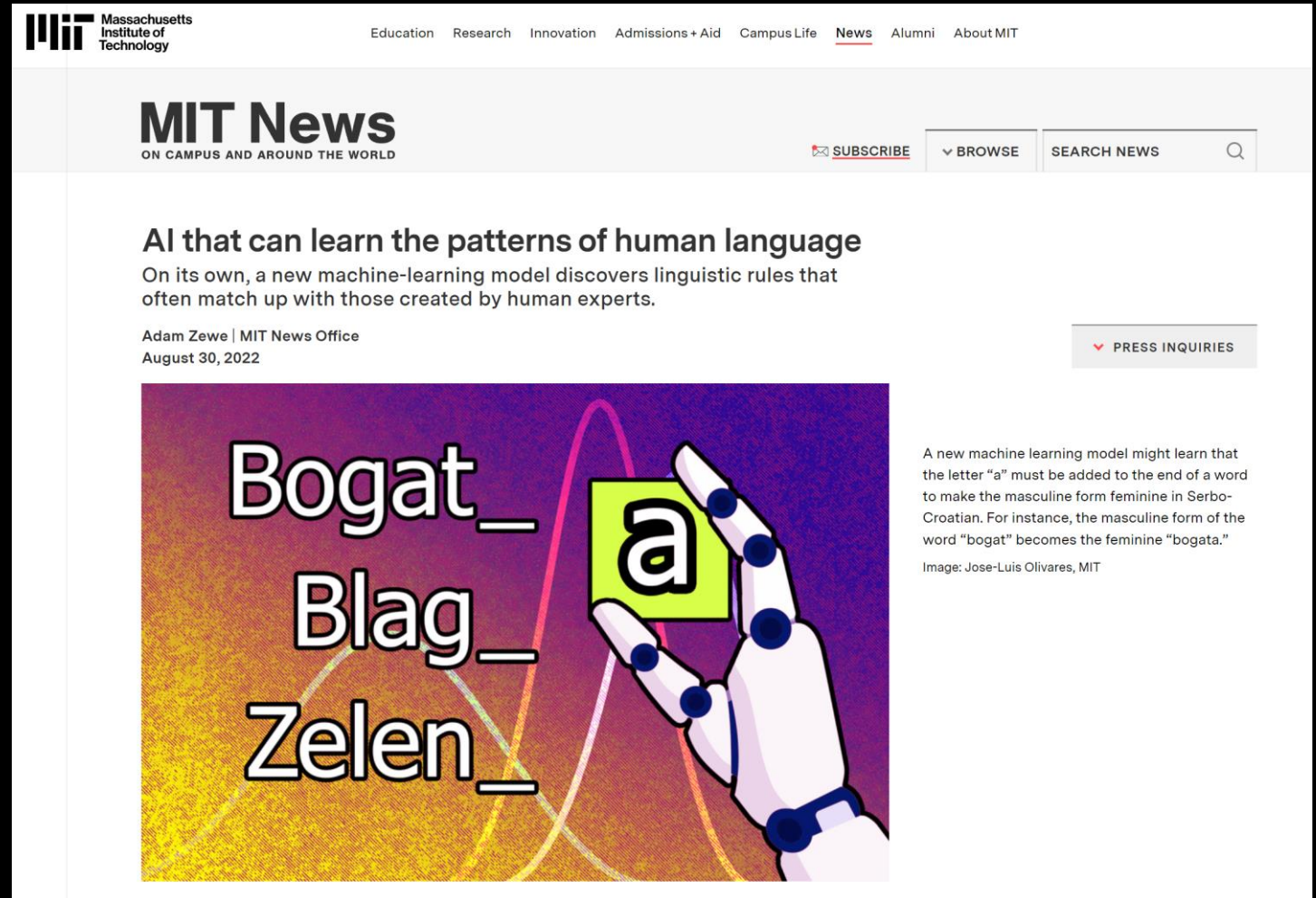
The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth. (Gen 11:6-9)



Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

I. The tower of Babel revealed language as the basis for a united resistance to God.

Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” (Gen 11:4)



The image is a screenshot of an MIT News article. At the top left is the MIT logo and the text 'Massachusetts Institute of Technology'. To the right are navigation links: 'Education', 'Research', 'Innovation', 'Admissions + Aid', 'Campus Life', 'News' (highlighted), 'Alumni', and 'About MIT'. Below this is the 'MIT News' logo with the tagline 'ON CAMPUS AND AROUND THE WORLD'. To the right of the logo are buttons for 'SUBSCRIBE', 'BROWSE', and 'SEARCH NEWS'. The main headline is 'AI that can learn the patterns of human language'. Below it is a sub-headline: 'On its own, a new machine-learning model discovers linguistic rules that often match up with those created by human experts.' The author is 'Adam Zewe | MIT News Office' and the date is 'August 30, 2022'. There is a 'PRESS INQUIRIES' button on the right. The main image shows a robotic hand holding a green square with the letter 'a'. To the left of the hand are the words 'Bogat_', 'Blag_', and 'Zelen_' stacked vertically. The background of the image is a colorful, abstract pattern.

MIT News
ON CAMPUS AND AROUND THE WORLD

AI that can learn the patterns of human language
On its own, a new machine-learning model discovers linguistic rules that often match up with those created by human experts.

Adam Zewe | MIT News Office
August 30, 2022

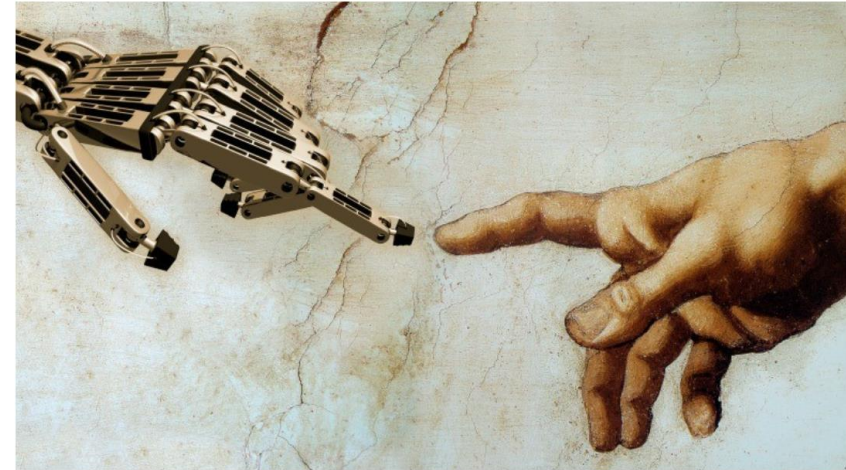
[PRESS INQUIRIES](#)

A new machine learning model might learn that the letter “a” must be added to the end of a word to make the masculine form feminine in Serbo-Croatian. For instance, the masculine form of the word “bogat” becomes the feminine “bogata.”
Image: Jose-Luis Olivares, MIT

Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

2. The fundamental tension in Babel was the same as in Eden and throughout human history; it is about human ascendancy vs. reliance on God.

“For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:5)



God and AI

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Open Immersive Reader

Introduction:

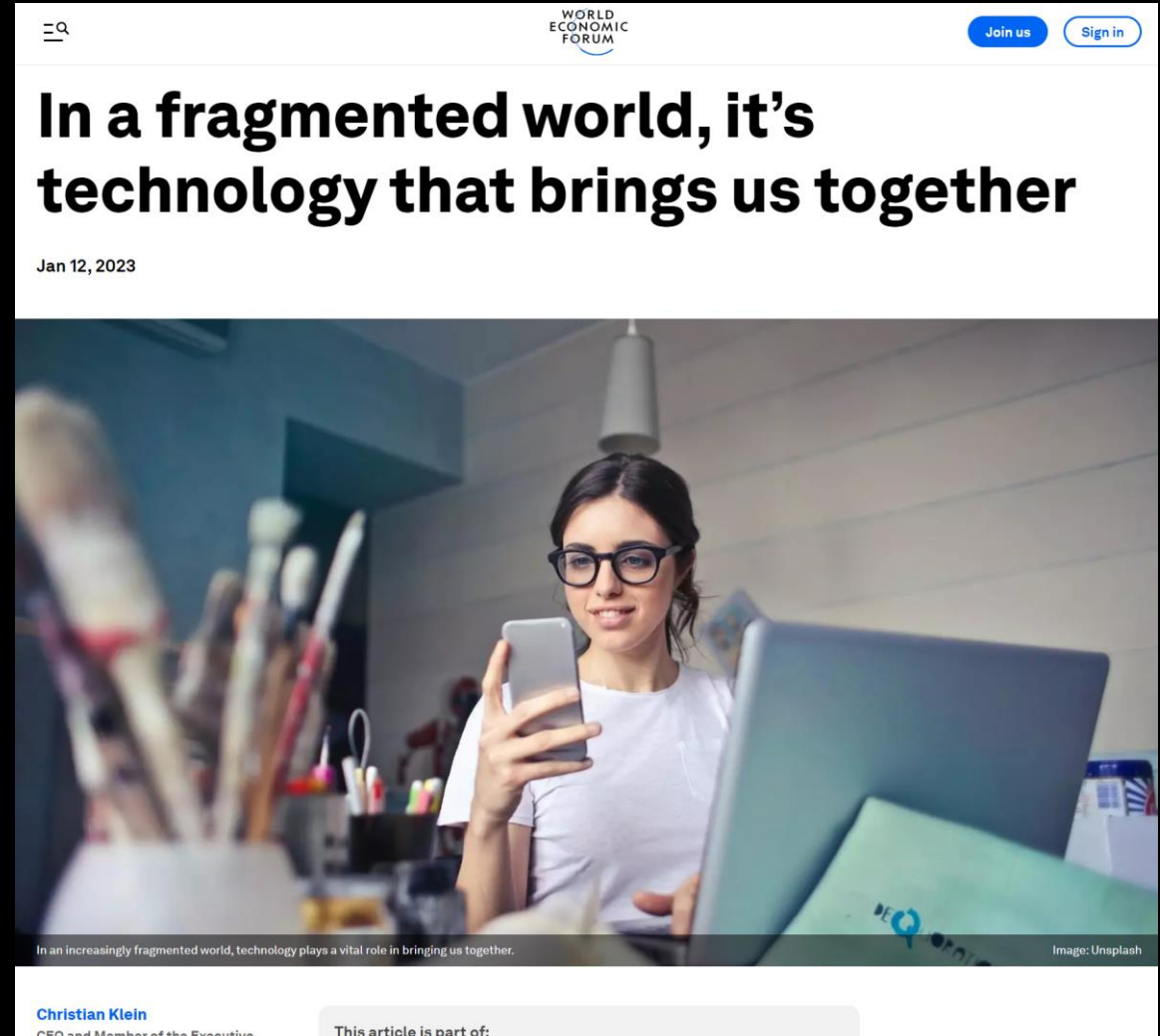
The term "God" resides within the realm of religion, a domain with a millennia-long history that has spawned numerous cultures and practices, continuing to shape humanity today.



Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

3. God impeded their efforts by bringing confusion to their speech, which caused people to move out into the world (i.e., it divided them spatially and ethnically).

So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. (Gen 11:8)



The image is a screenshot of a webpage from the World Economic Forum. At the top right, there is a search icon, the World Economic Forum logo, and two buttons labeled 'Join us' and 'Sign in'. The main heading of the article is 'In a fragmented world, it's technology that brings us together' in a large, bold, black font. Below the heading, the date 'Jan 12, 2023' is displayed. The central part of the image is a photograph of a young woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a white t-shirt, sitting at a desk. She is holding a smartphone in her right hand and looking at it with a slight smile. A laptop is open in front of her, and a pen holder with various pens is visible on the desk to her left. At the bottom of the image, there is a small caption: 'In an increasingly fragmented world, technology plays a vital role in bringing us together.' and 'Image: Unsplash'. Below the image, the author's name 'Christian Klein' is listed, followed by his title 'CEO and Member of the Executive'. To the right of this, there is a button that says 'This article is part of:'.

Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

4. Human speech continues (through modern media) to be a primary vehicle for resistance to God. The tongue is a restless evil (James 3:8).



The screenshot shows the Catholic Herald website. The main article is titled "How technology is enabling religious persecution" by Carl Miller, dated March 14, 2019. Below the article title is a cartoon illustration by Adams 19 depicting a diverse group of people walking on a street. Red rectangular bounding boxes are overlaid on the cartoon, suggesting facial recognition or digital tracking technology. The cartoon includes a woman with glasses and a red jacket, a man with a blue scarf, a woman in a green coat and red hat, a man with glasses and a red scarf, and several other individuals. The artist's signature "ADAMS 19" is visible at the bottom of the cartoon.

It was late last year, and I was witnessing a new form of religious persecution. In front of me, millions of tweets had been turned into metrics: lines, graphs, dots and splashes of colour. They showed a big group of Twitter accounts, who had all joined the platform together in August 2015. Obsessed with sport at first, their early online lives were dedicated



Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

5. In the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the motivations underlying humans change, and tongues are used to proclaim the great works of God (Acts 2:11). People are united for the giving of the Spirit and united in their message (Acts 2:1).

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:4-5)



Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

6. Those who receive the Spirit are given the ability to ignore language-barriers (which are explained in ethnic terms) and speak a unified message (Acts 2:9-11).

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:6-12)

Pentecost as Reversal of Babel

7. The purpose behind all of it is to bring salvation to people who are far off (Acts 2:39). What happens at Pentecost is the announcement and expression of this purpose.

“And **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Acts 2:21)

“The promise is for you and your children and for **all who are far off**—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:39)



Tongues in Acts & Paul

Tongues in Acts (Luke)	Tongues in 1 Cor 12-14 (Paul)
Tongues (<i>glossai</i>) are languages (2:4).	Tongues (<i>glossai</i>) are languages (13:1; 14:10-11).
Tongues are inspired by the Spirit (2:4). They are part of the wonders and signs prophesied by Joel (2:19).	Tongues are a gift of the Spirit (12:7-11)
Tongues are apparently not understood by the speaker (2:4)	Tongues are not understood by the speaker unless the speaker is supernaturally given understanding (14:13-15)
Tongues can be understood by someone who knows the language (2:8-11) but not to those who don't (2:13).	Tongues are understood when they are interpreted (which is a specific gift in its own right) (12:10, 30; 14:13)
Those who don't understand the tongues mistake it for drunkenness (2:13)	

Tongues in Acts & Paul

Tongues in Acts (Luke)	Tongues in 1 Cor 12-14 (Paul)
Pentecost depicts those who receive tongues (each/all of those who were in the original house or room, 2:4) vs. others who merely witnessed it (2:6). In other words, not everyone is depicted as receiving tongues.	Not everyone is given the gift of tongues (implied in 12:10; 14:22; specifically noted in 12:30, where the question is asked in a way where the answer must be “no”).
Tongues functions as a sign to unbelievers (2:11-13)	Tongues functions as a sign to unbelievers (14:22)
In some contexts, tongues are not interpreted or understood (10:46; 19:6) with no obvious ministerial function, but clearly to edify the individual.	Without a gift of interpretation, tongues are not interpreted or understood (14:2, 16-19). But there is still edification to the individual who has the gift (14:4).
Tongues are viewed in positive terms (as a sign of the Holy Spirit) in Acts, whether or not they are understood. But none of the examples of tongues happen in the context of a worship service. They all appear spontaneously when the Spirit first comes upon people.	Tongues are viewed in positive terms in 1 Corinthians (Paul wishes all to receive the gift, 14:5, and has it himself, 14:18) except when it brings disorder to the worship service (14:26-28, 40). In other words, some believers have the ability to manifest the gift at will.

Tongues in Acts & Paul

1. Tongues differ between Acts and I Corinthians in function. In Acts, it is spontaneous as the Spirit is first given to believers. In I Corinthians, it is a voluntary exercise that occurs in the context of worship. These aren't two types of tongues; they are different contexts and purposes. In Acts, the gift is the Spirit (Acts 2:28) and tongues is a result of a "filling" by the Spirit (2:4). In I Corinthians, tongues is a gift from the Spirit (I Cor 12:4, 10-11) for the common good of building up the body of Christ.
2. There is no definite, notable difference between the manifestation of tongues in Acts and I Corinthians except that, in Acts, there is no gift of interpretation (but it is not necessary because the tongues are known languages that are understood by some of the people present).

Tongues in Acts & Paul

3. Nothing follows from this about the linguistic nature of tongues (whether a known language or not), though Paul indicates that tongues requires supernatural interpretation (which implies that it is not a known language, normally), and he uses the expression “the tongues of men or of angels” (1 Cor 13:1) which implies that while tongues is a language, the language may not be human.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. (1 Cor 13:1)



Tongues in Acts & Paul

4. The Spirit is given as a second work in Acts as the Spirit moves out to different groups of people (e.g., Acts 10:44-48). But every indication is that this baptism occurs directly in connection with receiving the Spirit at the point of salvation (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 12:12-13), not as a secondary work of the Spirit subsequent to salvation.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. (1 Cor 12:13)



Tongues in Acts & Paul

5. Scripture doesn't instruct believers to be baptized in the Spirit but rather to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).



Tongues in Acts & Paul

6. Gifts of the Spirit can apparently be given at any time after salvation (see 1 Cor 14:1, where Paul instructs them to desire the gifts, cf. also 1 Cor 12:31). Gifts are distributed according to the will of the Spirit, which implies he can give them at any time (1 Cor 12:11). Paul wishes they would all receive tongues (1 Cor 14:5), which implies they may yet receive the gift. In other words, the gifts of the Spirit are not the same as the baptism of the Spirit.

Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. (1 Cor 12:30-31)

I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified. (1 Cor 14:5)

Tongues in Acts & Paul

7. There are no biblical grounds for asserting that tongues (or any other gift) cannot manifest in today's world. Such a claim limits the Spirit's ability to do what he determines (1 Cor 12:11). The only indication of a time when the gifts will end is the state of perfection which will occur in eternity, after the return of Christ (1 Cor 13:8-10). In such a state, the gifts would not be needed.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. (1 Cor 13:8-10)



Tongues in Acts & Paul

8. All this said, the gift of tongues can be counterfeited, like any of the gifts, but without a clear way to establish its validity. An unnatural preoccupation with this gift (or any gift that does not have an explicit point of validation) is suspicious. Paul's emphasis is therefore on gifts that tangibly build up others (1 Cor 14:17-19). The validation to the work of the Spirit is the edification of his people.

Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified. (1 Cor 14:16-17)



The Spirit in Your Life vs. Gifts in Your Life

1. When you trust in Christ, you are given the Holy Spirit. This gift is the key to the life you need, a life that never ends. But you still have the ability to grieve the Spirit (Eph 4:30), resist the leading of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-18, 25), and let something other than the Spirit fill (control) your life (Eph 5:18).



The Spirit in Your Life vs. Gifts in Your Life

2. Gifts are special capacities for the Holy Spirit to work through your life for the edification of God's people. These gifts are distributed the way the Spirit determines, and your role in the church is typically related to the gift(s) you are given (1 Cor 12:7-31). We are not all given the same gifts.).



The Spirit in Your Life vs. Gifts in Your Life

3. Possessing and using a gift can be a blessing to you, as you see God work in and through you. But not all gifts are the same with regard to their role and significance in the body of Christ. Gifts that strengthen the body are more desirable than ones that merely encourage you as an individual. Paul therefore downplays tongues, which has a limited role in encouraging others, and elevates those which bring understanding. I would go so far as to say (and I think Paul would agree) that tongues is perhaps the least important gift in the list (in practical terms), and yet it is one that has a veneer of supernaturalism, which can lead to pride.



The Spirit in Your Life vs. Gifts in Your Life

4. Paul puts all the gifts as secondary to love (1 Cor 13). Love is the focus of God's essence and the expression of the Spirit's power in and through us. When the gifts go away in eternity, love will remain. Any expression of the Spirit which does not occur as an outpouring of love is therefore misdirected. What God wants for each of us is that we become a certain kind of person. The Spirit actively works to change us.



Prophecy and the Outpouring of the Spirit

1. When the Spirit is given, it happens in a context where the word is proclaimed. (Acts 2:14-36)
2. In the first stage of his sermon, Peter explains that the outpouring of the Spirit was always part of God's plan (Acts 2:17-21, quoting Joel 2:28-32). In other words, a supernatural manifestation of God's power among his people was part of the plan for the last days.
3. In the second stage of his sermon, Peter relates Jesus' ministry (including signs and wonders) to a fulfillment of prophecy regarding the Messiah. For David's words in Ps 16:8-11 and Ps 110:1 to be true, Messiah had to die and ascend to God.



Prophecy and the Outpouring of the Spirit

4. The combination of these two components (the Spirit coming and the Messiah leaving) forms the basis for the church age. To participate in the great work of God, one must repent and receive the gift of the Spirit. Peter adds to this the need to be separated from the corruption of the current generation (Acts 2:38-40).
5. The result was that the church increased to more than 3000 people. This number increased through the ministry of the apostles and the unity of the church (Acts 2:41-27).
6. Prophecy and power continue to be the basis for our vision, faith, and behavior as we wait (together, in unity) for the return of our Lord and Savior.

