

I. And first as to the *fact*. It is this—that the foreigners, Jews and proselytes present, heard ignorant unlearned Galileans speaking the various languages peculiar to their several countries—languages which they could not be expected to know, and the command of which must have been suddenly and miraculously bestowed upon them. This is the clear, literal, indisputable sense of the passage. True, other explanations have been proposed. Some have imagined that the disciples *spoke* in their own mother tongue, while the listeners *heard* in their various dialects. Some hint at animal magnetism and the possibility of a clairvoyant *rapport* being established between the apostles and their hearers. And some, again, suppose that a new spiritual language was uttered, and that the susceptible hearers involuntarily translated, each into his own tongue. But all these explanations are connected with some forcing of the text, or propped up by some far-fetched or impossible interpretation; they do not comport with the plain natural view of the passage. To the candid, unprejudiced mind there can be no doubt that the fact which the whole narrative sets before us is that by a sudden and powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the disciples uttered, not of their own minds, but as mouthpieces of the Spirit, the praises of God in the various languages of their hearers—languages hitherto (and possibly at the time itself) unknown to them. Such is the wonder affirmed.

II. Let us, secondly, mark its prophetic significance. The contemplation of a miracle so extraordinary, so stupendous, cannot but give rise to questions as to its nature and meaning. Was it, we are led to ask, a *gift bestowed on the disciples for their subsequent use*; or was it a *prophetic sign*?—their utterance being *only* as they were *mouthpieces* of the inspiring Spirit.

The former is the view more commonly taken. According to this, the gift of speaking in various languages was bestowed on the disciples for the purpose of enabling them, not only at Pentecost, but subsequently, to preach the Gospel to men of other lands and tongues. This view seems plausible, and it certainly is popular. But few of its upholders have seriously considered the many and weighty objections to which it lies open. Let me point out some of them. In the first place, if this had been the meaning and this the use of the Pentecostal gift, is it not strange that we find no trace whatever, in the whole New Testament history, of such a power as it would have conferred being either possessed or exercised by the apostles or by apostolic men? Is it not strange that such a standing miracle as it would have been is never pointed out in any of the sermons after Pentecost, as undeniable proof of the more than human authority with which the apostles spoke? And is it not strange that such a use of the gift as that supposed was unheard of in the earliest times—unmentioned until the fourth century—that is to say, until long after the gift itself had died out of the Christian Church? Besides, if the dissemination of the Gospel were the direct purpose of the miraculous donation, why should the speaking with tongues, referred to in our text, have *begun* prior to the arrival of those who could understand the tongues? It certainly had commenced before the multitudes came together. And where, in this view, was the necessity for it? for they all understand the one language in which Peter immediately after addresses the whole assemblage; and thousands are moved, touched, converted. And as to that Roman empire from the many provinces of which the hearers come, whose far-extending domain is to be the field where apostolic hands are to labour and apostolic tongues to preach, the primitive missionaries could make themselves understood almost anywhere by means of that graceful, subtle and flexible Greek which had interpenetrated the whole known world. And lastly, while the history of primitive missions gives no intimation that the rapid spread of the Gospel was caused or even aided by any such use of this spiritual gift, distinct intimations, we think, appear that *ordinary* and *continued* ability to speak and to comprehend foreign tongues formed no part of it. For many consentient early Christian writers declare that Mark was the