

WITH STAMMERING LIPS AND ANOTHER TONGUE: 1 COR 14:20-22 AND ISA 28:11-12

DAVID E. LANIER
Criswell College, Dallas TX 75246

I. Introduction

The relationship of Isa 28:11-12 to 1 Cor 14:20-22 in the writings of Paul has long been an interpretive stumbling block. The exact correlation of the historical setting of Isaiah's passage to the conflict over tongues in Corinth is difficult to fathom, and Paul's conclusion exacerbates the matter. J. B. Phillips went so far as to rewrite 1 Cor 14:22, changing Paul's words to the exact opposite in four places. He explained such procedure in a footnote: "This is the sole instance of the translator's departing from the accepted text. He felt bound to conclude from the sense of the next three verses that we have here either a slip of the pen on the part of Paul, or, more probably, a copyist's error."¹

This is all the more remarkable when we reflect that it was done with absolutely no manuscript support whatsoever; there are no major variants or textual problems with the NT text itself. This paper will attempt a historical and exegetical analysis of 1 Cor 14:21 and its companion verse in the OT to see if historical, linguistic, or interpretive factors can help solve the impasse.

The major problem is not with understanding the Isaiah passage; the context itself is relatively clear. Paul's application of the passage

¹ J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) 552, n. 5. A good introductory survey of the problems involved can be found in G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 676-85. See also R. P. Martin, *The Spirit and the Congregation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 72-73.

presents the issue, for it seems to some as if he has written in total disregard of the context and applied the passage in a way that contradicts its NT context. For example, Paul makes the statement "tongues are for unbelievers" when he has just been demonstrating how uninterpreted tongues in the Corinthian church would just cause unbelievers to conclude that Christians are mad. Furthermore, he goes on to say, "prophecy is not for unbelievers" in a context in which he will go on to say that prophecy is one good way for an unbeliever to be convicted and accept Christ.

It is hoped that by careful analysis we might understand more clearly what Paul is trying to say to Corinth and the principles by which he is applying Isaiah's oracle to the Corinthian situation in what seems to be a classic case of misunderstanding.

II. *Background and Context of Isa 28:11-12*

Isa 28:11-12 fits into a larger section of the first half of the Book of Isaiah. Chapters 28-33 are widely held to be Isaianic and contain a collection of "woes" in which Isaiah is warning Judah about its ill-fated alliance with Assyria. These woes are sandwiched between pronouncements against foreign nations (chapters 24-27) and a collection of eschatological prophecies (chapters 34-35).² The prophet Isaiah opens the section with a scathing denunciation of the drunkards of Ephraim. He pronounces a woe upon them and predicts the downfall of the northern kingdom at the hands of Assyria. Most commentators who see the oracle as genuine predictive prophecy date it prior to the fall of Samaria in 597-587 B.C.

There was some danger that the rulers in Jerusalem would join in this political alliance, and Isaiah is unsparing in his zeal to expose the blindness and incompetence of Judah's and Israel's rulers. He never wavers, however, in holding out God's purposes for Zion as something which could not be thwarted even through the folly of men and the overwhelming destruction which would be brought on them by Assyria.³ These emphases belong properly to the latter days of Isaiah's ministry.

Isa 28:1-6 constitutes one oracle against the northern kingdom, Ephraim, and leads into an indictment of Judah itself. The major question with regard to vv 7-13 is whether Israel or Judah is being addressed. Whereas most commentators will begin the oracle against Judah with v 7, Exum points out that the word "Jerusalem" does not actually appear until v 14. "This people" is being judged, but which people is it? Not until v 14 are Jerusalem's leaders specifically called to task.

² *IDB*, 1962 ed., S.v. "Isaiah," by C. R North.

³ *Ibid.*

The best solution is probably to conclude that vv 1-13 are pronounced against the northern kingdom and its capital Samaria but that the strong parallels between vv 1-4 and 14-22 suffice to show the southern leaders that their situation is not much different in the sight of God.⁴

Verses 1-13 make it clear that destruction is coming to Ephraim because the people have rejected instruction. In vv 1-6 we see the spectacle of the drunken leaders of Ephraim. Beginning in v 7, the priests and prophets themselves appear-drunken, sitting at a table covered with filth and vomit.⁵ Isaiah asks who is left to learn the lesson of God, the infants just weaned from milk? He then presents to them the spectacle of extremely young children learning their first principles while God addresses them in baby talk. But the wise drunkards of Ephraim will not listen to the tedious repetitions of the prophet; therefore, all the people will receive instruction from God through the stammering tongues of Assyrians. "This people" has refused the rest and covenant relationship offered by God; they have mocked his prophet. Now they must endure a different lesson from God, mediated through babbling masters. The message is one of utter destruction and cruel exile: "That they might go and stumble backward, be broken, snared, and taken captive."⁶

The verses contained in Isa 28:11-12 constitute a prophecy of warning which takes a mocking line (either spoken by God to the little infants, the last who will hear, or by the scoffers themselves as a taunt intended for Isaiah, according to the two most common interpretations)⁷ and repeats it verbatim with a terrifying change of tone and focus. The people who were so addressed by the prophet would have had little trouble making the connection in their original *Sitz im Leben*: the cruel Assyrians are going to be God's mouthpiece to speak to "this people" (no longer called "his people"). They have disregarded the paths of peace (cf. Deut 12:9 and 1 Kgs 8:56) and forged the chains of their own slavery. O. Kaiser feels that v 12 presents a summary of Isaiah's basic preaching: Yahweh states explicitly that since his message through the prophet has been rejected by the people and their leaders alike, the catastrophe that followed was a consequence they had brought upon themselves by rejecting Yahweh's rest.⁸

⁴ J. C. Exum, "Isaiah 28-32: A Literary Approach," *SBLASP* 17 (1979) 124.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶ Isa. 28:1Sc. Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Exum, 134. I

⁸ O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 246, Kaiser does not hold the prophecy to be predictive; he sees v 12 as the work of a redactor writing after the fall of Samaria, the *terminus a quo* thus being set between 597 and 587 B.C.

Whether vv 9-10 are placed in the mouth of God or those mocking Isaiah for treating them like infants, one thing is clear: there is a caricaturing tone presented (which is about to become deadly serious) representing the prophecies of Isaiah to Ephraim. The introductory word of our verses, כִּי, "indeed," "as a matter of fact," introduces a contrast and subtly begins to change the content of the message. In v 10 the mocking words of the drunkards (or of God speaking to children), צוּ לְצוּ לְגוּ קוּ לְקוּ קוּ לְקוּ זַעִיר שָׁם זַרִיר שָׁם, reduce God's prophecy ad absurdum. Verses 11-12 represent a very fateful link: in v 13, the same words are heard again, this time with a deadly finality. What began as mocking caricature has come to devastation and ruin. Their fate has been sealed by the epitaph of Samaria in v 11: God had indeed told them the paths of peace and rest, "but they would not listen,"⁹

The text of Isa 28:11-12 preserved in the Masoretic tradition is very stable, presenting only one variant reading noted by the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.¹⁰ The qal perfect third person plural form of אָבִיא, אָבִיא, "they were willing, desirous," reads אָבִיא in the Great Scroll of Isaiah, IQIs¹¹ Gesenius notes that an אָ was sometimes appended to the end of a word with a final u, i, or o (for example, אָבִיא in Isa 28:12). He takes it to be an early scribal error. This would, if true, make the MT more conservative than the DSS IQIs^a dating from 150-125 B.C.¹² Some grammarians, however, take it to be the last vestige of "Arabic orthography," a view Gesenius rejects. Davidson, for example, considers the form to be paragogic אָ (appended either inorganically or to give emphasis or modify the meaning of the word), usual in the Arabic for the third person plural and found in the Hebrew as well (cf. Josh 10:24).¹³ The meanings of all the words which

⁹ E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 2:277.

¹⁰ BHS, 715.

¹¹ Besides this variant there are minor spelling variants, *holem waw* written defectively three times in the MT, and the consonant הָ appended to the word אֱלֹהִים in IQIs^a. Concerning אֱלֹהִים we may have an example of הָ locale described by Gesenius as a remnant of an early case ending appended to a substantive to express direction towards an object, the original force of which should be disregarded when added to a substantive with a preposition prefixed; after לְ, אֶל, or עַד it is easily explained. E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2d ed (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910) p. 250. Hereafter cited as Gesenius. Nagelsbach sees it as a note of interrogation, however. C. W. E. Nagelsbach, *The Prophet Isaiah Theologically and Homiletically Expounded*, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures (ed. J. P. Lange; 14 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1878) 11.303.

¹² Gesenius, 81.

¹³ B. Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (2d ed.; London: Bagster and Sons, 1850; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1982) 17. The same view is held by Young, 2:278. The other variants can be seen in the first column of appendix 1.

contain variants in the IQIs^a remained substantially the same from 150-124 B.C. to A.D. 1009.

*The Septuagint: Isa 28:10-13.*¹⁴

The major critical editions of the LXX have the same text throughout the passage, although there are many minority readings (see appendix 1 for the most significant variant readings). The most important deviation from the MT comes in v 11: "He [YHWH] will speak to this people" becomes "They [the heathen] will speak to this people." This has serious implications for the reading of the passage as a whole because it is no longer a message of judgment for ignoring God's prophet but a message of valiant endurance under the persecutions of the heathen.

Similarly, the message is different. In the MT the stammering lips came *after* the people had refused to hear God's original message, "This [is] the rest, give rest to the weary, and this [is] the repose." Now the heathen themselves are speaking the message with stammering lips, "This [is] the rest to the hungry and this [is] the destruction." The people bravely resist this offer and thus expose themselves to tribulation upon tribulation and hope upon hope. The Lucianic MS tradition actually reads, "This [is] the rest to the hungry and this [is] the *syntagma*." which was a Greek battle formation. Symmachus preserves the quotation from the MT with ἡ ἡρεμία (rest) in the second position. It is one thing for them to turn down offer from the Gentiles to cooperate or capitulate; it is quite another to refuse Isaiah's prophecies in order to forge a forbidden alliance with those God knew would ultimately destroy them!

The LXX also deviates in one other minor instance in v 12. The phrase "This is the rest [you-pl.] cause to rest [obj.] the weary" (תָּרַחַץ לְעַמִּי הַיָּבֵשׁ הַיָּבֵשׁ הַיָּבֵשׁ) has been simplified by the LXX writer by the omission of the hiphil imperative of רָחַץ, and the translation of לְ denoting direct object (Brown-Driver-Briggs, s.v., "7") as a Greek dative: "This [is] the rest to the hungry" (τοῦτο τὸ ἀνάπαυμα τῷ πεινῶντι). This does not affect the sense of the verses, but it shows paraphrastic,

¹⁴ J. Ziegler, ed., *Isaias, Septuaginta Vetus Testamentum Graecum* (3d ed.; 18 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 14.217-18. The text reads: 10. "Take tribulation upon tribulation, hope upon hope, yet a little yet a little 11. through disparagement of lips, through another language because they will speak to this people 12. saying to it, 'This [is] the rest to the hungry, and this [is] the destruction'; yet they were not willing to hear. 13. And the word of the Lord God shall be to them tribulation upon tribulation hope upon hope, yet a little yet a little, in order that they might go and fall backward and they shall be crushed and shall be in danger, and shall be taken." The LXX translation is the author's except for 13b-f which is after L. C. L. Brenton.

simplifying tendency on the part of the LXX translator. Similarly, the "inscrutable phrases" from Isaiah are translated into a smooth Greek form and incorporated into the flow of the text itself in a manner that obscures the irony of the original. The LXX remains a translation of the MT, but it comes to the verge of interpretive paraphrase in several places.¹⁵

The word **לַעֲזוֹב** means "mocking" or "derision" primarily and only in a secondary sense "stammering (of barbarous language)."¹⁶ So the LXX rendering **ὁ φαυλισμός** as "disparagement," "contempt" is not etymologically far from the mark.¹⁷ The thrust of the passage is not that the invaders sound like stammerers, but that they are using their native language in a mocking, derisive way against the Hebrews. Here again the original force of Isaiah's passage seems to have been reversed. In this instance the divergence is not as serious, but taken with the change of verb number and speaker, the LXX rendering is substantively different from the MT. Paul will place the prophecy back into the mouth of YHWH and the responsibility for disobedience back upon the children of Israel who ignored YHWH's warning. It is this questionable quality of the LXX translation that led H. B. Swete to write concerning Isa 28:11 (1 Cor 14:21): "The. . . quotation is probably from memory. . . , but the Apostle's knowledge of the original has enabled him *to improve upon the faulty rendering of the LXX.*"¹⁸ (Emphasis mine.)

III. *An Exegesis of 1 Cor 14:20-22*

Background and Context

First Corinthians is generally considered to have been written by the Apostle Paul from Ephesus in the mid-first century A.D. Though a final verdict depends on whether his stay in Ephesus covered two or

¹⁵ Cf. J. Ziegler's verdict from *Untersuchungen zur Septuaginta des Buches Isaias* (1934): "[The translator] was not over-concerned to reproduce his original exactly, word for word; he had no hesitation in simply omitting difficult or rare words if the sense of the sentence was not thereby disturbed, or dividing up phrases or joining them together differently if he could not make sense of his original. Often he appears to have been governed by a particular thought. Thus in Isaiah we meet with many translations which can properly be described as 'free.'" Quoted in Ernest Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* (trans. E. F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 48.

¹⁶ *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1979 ed., repro 1983, s.v. "לַעֲזוֹב."

¹⁷ LSJ, s.v. "φαυλίζω." The verb form means to "hold cheap, worthless." The noun form also appears as τὸ φαυλίχμα, -ατος, but the word does not appear in the NT.

¹⁸ H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (rev. ed.; ed. R R Otley; Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1914) 402.

three years, the letter appears to have been composed shortly before his departure at Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8) either in early spring or late winter A.D. 55. One of the crucial considerations in dating the book is whether the Passover festival was going on at the time of writing (cf. 1 Cor 5:7-8). The most accepted chronology will take Pentecost as his departure time with the resulting time frame cited above.¹⁹

The recipients of the letter, the members of the church in Corinth which Paul founded, were having problems with church unity and were divided into carnal, warring factions. Paul's epistle in several places seems to be addressing, questions on pressing issues posed to him by the Corinthians themselves.²⁰ One of these questions is addressed in chapters 12-14. Paul's answer revolves around the relative value of tongues and prophecy. He begins chapter 12 by giving a test by which to tell demonic inspiration from the genuine activity of God (no person speaking by the Holy Spirit will call Jesus accursed, 1 Cor 12:3) and proceeds to demonstrate with a beautiful metaphor of the human body how each component part of Christ's body needs and is needed by the others. The varieties of gifts and abilities are to contribute to the well-being of the whole body and are not to be used selfishly as ends in themselves to benefit one faction alone. Chapter 13 asserts in language unmatched by world literature the spirit that should underlie every endeavor in Christ's service: none of the gifts, abilities, or talents men may possess are of value unless motivated by the spirit of unconditional love. Chapter 14 represents an application of sorts to the lofty and beautiful peak achieved in chapter 13. We have come back down into the valley now and will see whether the Corinthians have learned to apply the lesson of love. They seem to have been exalting tongues as the sign for believers, a supreme gift around which to rally the true body of Christ. Paul's intent is to show that such behavior is childish and produces exactly the opposite results than those they should desire. The Corinthians have misunderstood the relative value of tongues and prophecy, have inverted them as it were, and Paul delineates for them the implications of what they have been doing.

In the immediate context of the verses we will examine (1 Cor 14:20-25), Paul begins in vv 1-5 by telling the Corinthians to "pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy"; what he desires for them is perspective. Motivated by love, they are to

¹⁹ *IDB*, 1964 ed., S.v. "First Corinthians," by S. M Gilmour.

²⁰ They seem to have included questions concerning marriage and divorce (7:1-40), food offered to idols (8:1-11:1), and the proper use of tongues in worship (12:1-14:40). J. MacGorman, "Glossolalic Error and its Correction: 1 Corinthians 12-14," *Rev Exp* 80 (1983) 389.

esteem spiritual gifts according to their benefit for others, not their own selfish pursuits. Tongues do not edify men who do not understand; they may indeed edify self and glorify God, but the one who prophesies instructs and edifies others. Paul concludes this introductory section by saying that the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in a tongue (unless being interpreted it has value as prophecy) because he builds up the body of Christ. (The Corinthians in their immaturity have been virtually tearing up Christ's body.)

Verses 6-19 illustrate the point Paul has been making in several ways and build up to a stronger, even more personal metaphor from the Apostle. If a bugle gives an uncertain call, the soldiers will be confused and unprepared for battle. If the Corinthian believers are "speaking into the air," they will remain foreigners to those around them; and the uninformed unbelievers among them will not even be able to add "amen" to their praises and thanksgivings to God. This behavior is unfruitful; the unbelievers are neither convicted nor edified. Paul speaks the strongest conclusion yet in vv 18-19: he himself speaks with tongues and understands as well as they do the benefits they hold; indeed, he thanks God for this gift. Then comes his verdict: he had rather speak five words to the genuine instruction of others than ten thousand incomprehensible words.

The first verse of our section represents a strong admonition to the Corinthian Christians to be mature in their understanding and babes in malice, the implication being that they had been acting in just the opposite fashion. In selfishly exalting unintelligible tongues as a sign for believers, they were babes in understanding, babbling like selfish infants. The unbelievers were not being convicted, and the believers were not being edified--the Corinthians had only been "mature in malice"--albeit unwittingly. The argument thus far presented runs: untranslated tongues do no more than to confuse unbelievers and leave the church unedified. Prophecy, on the other hand, edifies the church and allows the unbeliever to say his "amen" to their giving of thanks--he does not feel like a foreigner shut out of God's plans. Paul's point is that in reversing their priorities and elevating tongues above prophecy, they had gotten the opposite of the desired result. Isa 28:11-12 illustrates "from the law" this exact phenomenon: untranslated tongues harden unbelievers in their unbelief, whereas clear prophecy has always been intended to build up those who will believe and apply it.

The use of Isa 28:11-12 in 1 Cor 14:21 constitutes one of the nine λέγει κύριος quotations of the NT (four are Paul's). All of these citations vary from both the LXX and the MT not only in omission or addition of wording but in the actual substance of the text itself. In six

instances (1 Cor 14:21 is one) the phrase λέγει κύριος is an addition to the text of the OT. The five non-Pauline references have the phrase or its equivalent in the OT text.²¹ It could be that in this instance Paul is drawing upon his apostolic status and authority to drive his point home. Ellis says concerning these quotations:

λέγει κύριος is the badge of prophetic pronouncement in the OT. Its presence in the NT probably has an equivalent significance and may give a clue to understanding the role which the NT exegete--or better, the NT prophet--considered himself to fill. The gift of prophecy was highly regarded in the apostolic age [cf. 1 Corinthians 14]; it was a specific gift or appointment of the Holy Spirit; and it was not conferred upon all. Early Christians without doubt used the word in full light of its OT significance, and, indeed, some of the functions most peculiar to OT prophets, such as predictive utterance, appear in their NT counterpart.²²

Ellis holds that his particular use of a λέγει κύριος quotation concerns the judicial significance of "tongues," and after R. Harris considers it to be one part of a testimonia collection within the "framework of anti-Jewish polemic."²³ This may well be so, but it is important to note that no anti-Jewish polemic is being carried on in 1 Corinthians 14; rather, the emphasis seems to be upon lessening the emotional value of tongues vis-a-vis prophecy by citing an OT example of the negative impact tongues have upon unbelievers and then contrasting it with the results mature Corinthian Christians should desire "in love."²⁴ J. Sweet feels (after Ellis) that the quotation had been used in anti-Jewish polemic as part of a *testimonia* collection concerned with explaining the disbelief of the Jews and divine judgment upon Israel (cf. Rom 12:19 [Deut 32:35] and Rom 14:11 [Isa 45:25 and 49:18 or Deut 32:40]). He explains that as the Corinthians' speaking in tongues served as a sign of divine judgment against unbelieving Jews, now Paul turns their own apologetic against them as a sign against immature believers.²⁵ It is in this context that Sweet cites J. Barr's admonition, "It seems that we generally have to see the use of quotations not against the context from which the quotations were taken, which is

²¹ E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (n.p., 1957; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 107.

²² *Ibid.*, 109.

²³ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁴ Sweet feels that the Corinthians have claimed that "tongues serve as a sign for Christians," and that Paul is trying to reverse this claim in favor of prophecy. He explains the riddle of v 22 by placing the words "tongues are a sign for believers" in the mouths of the Corinthians. J. P. M. Sweet, "A Sign for Unbelievers: Paul's Attitude to Glossolalia," *NTS* 13 (1967) 241.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 243-44.

the modern literary approach, but against the context of what the early Christians were doing with them."²⁶ These points are well taken; but until it can be proved that Paul is using Isa 28:11-12 in disregard of its context, it is safer to assume that Paul not only was aware of its OT context but perhaps makes use of it here to prove his point. At any rate it is difficult to understand why Paul would have made an anti-Jewish polemic an integral part of this passage which is not primarily addressing itself to why the Jews are not accepting Christ but rather why the Corinthians are not acting as mature believers. The point is that if the Corinthians conduct worship as they ought; both Jew and Gentile will be convicted and converted and the body of Christ will be properly edified simultaneously.²⁷

Paul's text-form²⁸ differs from both the MT and the LXX although it appears at first glance that is closer to the MT.²⁹ Paul's use of coordinating conjunctions and prepositions seems to correspond more closely to the Hebrew than the LXX version. There is however early evidence from Origen that points to the fact that 1 Cor 14:21 and the text-form used by Aquila may have close affinities. Origen states in *Philocalia* 9.2. concerning 1 Cor 14:21:

But also the prophecy of Isaiah is also called "law" by the Apostle, as he says, "In the law it is written; 'with men of other tongues and with other lips I shall speak to this people, and even so they will not hearken unto me,' says the Lord." For I found the equivalent of this saying in the translation of Aquila.³⁰ (Emphasis mine.)

²⁶ Cited in Sweet, 242-43, n. 6.

²⁷ Cf. D. L Baker, "The main theme of the chapter [is]: prophecy and speaking in tongues both have a place in the lives of Christians, but in the Church prophecy is preferable because it edifies all who are present. Speaking in tongues may also be used in public worship if it is properly interpreted, but the effect on unbelievers should be borne in mind. Although it is a sign to them, they will probably conclude that those worshipping are mad, whereas the effect of prophecy is to bring conviction and conversion." Baker, "Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12-14," *EvQ* 46 (October/December 1974) 233. If this is so, it is difficult to fit Isa 28:11-12 into it in the primary sense of an anti-Jewish polemic. That does not fit the NT context and does not appear to be Paul's point.

²⁸ *UBSGNT*, 3d ed., 610.

²⁹ Sweet, 243. Hering disagrees, however, with this assessment. Jean Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (trans. A W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock; London: Epworth, 1962) 152, n. 14. See appendix 1.

³⁰ Ἄλλὰ καὶ ἡ τοῦ Ἡσαίου προφητεία νόμος παρὰ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ λέγεται, φάσκοντι· ἐν ἑτερογλώσσοις καὶ ἐν χεῖλεσιν ἑτέροις λαλήσω τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ, καὶ οὐδ' οὕτως εἰσακούσονται μου, λέγει κύριος. Εὗρον γὰρ τὰ ἰσοδυναμοῦντά τῇ λέξει ταύτη ταύτη ἐν τῇ τοῦ Ἀκούλου ἐρμηνείῃ κείμενα. (Emphasis mine.) Origen, *Philocalie*, 1-20 *sur les ecritures et La lettre a Africanus sur l'histoire de Suzanne* (trans. M. Harl and N. de Lange; Paris: Cerf, 1983) 352. This quote dates from the time of Hadrian. Hering, 152, n. 14.

The NT text has no variants marked in the UBSGNT, although a few minor variants exist. Ἐτερογλώσσοις is rendered ἑτέραις γλώσσαις in F G Vulgate (*in aliis linguis*) Tertullian; and the reading EV χείλεσιν ἑτέρων, "with lips of strangers," in **X** B A 17 and other cursives is rendered ἐν χείλεσιν ἑτέροις, "with strange lips," by P⁴⁶ and the majority text tradition including D E F G K L P. Robertson and Plummer consider these to be scribal corrections, but none of them substantively affects the reading.³¹ This renders Phillips' verdict on the text quoted in the introduction extremely problematic. We are dealing with a solid text in 1 Cor 14:22--totally untouched by scribal alteration in any extant manuscript.

The texts of the MT, LXX, and NT differ so much that definite signs of literary dependence are difficult to find. Hering concludes that Paul may either be quoting from memory or is dependent upon an ancient translation of Isaiah in Greek which Aquila used also.³² H. Conzelmann leans toward the latter possibility as a warning against concluding that Paul is "simply altering the text freely."³³ Michel believes that since ἑτερογλώσσοις is found in no other Greek translation, it must derive directly from Aquila's *Vorlage*.³⁴ Conzelmann, however, rightly observes that some originality on the part of Paul might be found. He feels the shift into first person, "I will speak," and the addition of "even so" stem from Paul's own hand.³⁵

When we compare the three text-forms (see appendix 1), we see that the most drastic deviation on the part of Paul comes in his omission of the entirety of the positive prophecy, ". . . unto whom he said, 'This [is] the rest; cause the weary to rest, and this [is] the repose.' . . ." In keeping with this omission, Paul changes the past tense verb-infinitive combination ("and they were not willing to hear" [NT]; וְיִמְצְאוּ אֲבָרָא אֲלֵי [MT]; καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησαν ἀκούειν [LXX]) into the prophetic past καὶ οὐδ' οὕτως εἰσακούσονται, using the future tense to express the certainty of the rebellion.

Paul also makes a drastic departure from the LXX in reassigning the quotation to the mouth of YHWH. No longer are the Assyrians speaking in stammering tongues to brave, resistant Israel; rather,

³¹ A Robertson and A Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911) 317. Hereafter cited as Robertson and Plummer.

³² Hering, 152, n. 14.

³³ H. Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. J. W. Leitch; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 242, n. 14.

³⁴ O. Michel, *Paulus und seine Bibel* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972) 65.

³⁵ Conzelmann, 242.

form is far from the MT, the thrust of what he says is much closer to the MT than the LXX; and certain factors in Paul's use of the text serve to heighten the notes of resistance, judgment, and punishment even further than the MT itself. Paul does not seem to want his readers to miss the point through his subtlety. Israel spurned God, and the stammering tongues were an unmistakable sign of God's judgment.

Exegesis and Interpretation

In the long and troubled history of the interpretation of 1 Cor 14:20-25, three factors emerge as interpretive problems. First, there is the problem of the significance of Isa 28:11-12. Does it really fit the Corinthian situation, and if so how? Is it being applied with no thought to its former context, which seems at first glance to be totally unrelated to the situation in Corinth? Second, what are the precise meanings of the key words *σημείον*, *ἄπιστοι*, *γλῶσσα*, and *πιστεύοντες*? Do they connote the same throughout, or do their meanings shift in mid-passage as some commentators assert? Third, what is the connection of v 22 to the context? Why do the illustrations of it in vv 23-24 seem flatly to contradict it? This last problem remains the most difficult of all for we must somehow explain why "tongues are a sign for unbelievers" (v 22) in a context where they just think the Christians are mad (vv 16, 23) and why "prophecy is . . . not for unbelievers" in a context in which an unbeliever is convicted and falls on his face worshipping as a result of clear prophecy (vv 24-25).³⁷

14:20 Paul begins in v 20 by giving an imperative to the Corinthians. They are not to be children in understanding but babes in malice. He is telling them to grow up: "In understanding be mature." This command may have brought to Paul's mind the immediate context of Isa 28:11-12 where Isaiah is asking the rhetorical question of Ephraim, "Whom will he [YHWH] teach knowledge? And whom will he [YHWH] make to understand the message? Those *just* weaned from milk? Those just drawn from the breasts?" We cannot claim to have penetrated the mind of the Apostle at this point; we only note that there are two links in the immediate context of both passages: a call for *understanding* and a search for mature believers to apply God's message. The theme of babies is applied ironically in each context. The application itself is different: Isaiah is lamenting that no one but perhaps the suckling infants is bothering to listen to God's message anymore in Ephraim; whereas Paul is ironically telling the Corinthians that if they are going to be babies about anything, let it be about evil or malice (*κακία*) but not about spiritual understanding.

³⁷ P. Roberts, "A Sign-Christian or Pagan?" *Exp Tim* 90 (April 1979) 199.

So we find three thematic, contextual affinities in the semantic domains of knowledge, babies, and a call to a mature hearkening to God's word.

14:21 Paul begins the Isaiah quote with the phrase "in the law"; he refers to the entire OT as law and seems to be making an appeal to divine authority.³⁸ The word *γέγραπται* might take perfective force in the sense of "it stands written," i.e., that the authority is continuing into the present and needs to be heeded; or it may be a stock introductory phrase "it is written," merely noting that the quotation is located in Scripture itself. The primary questions we have to ask at this point are why Paul chose this particular Isaiah passage and why he included it here. G. Findlay notes that Paul has been arguing the superiority of prophecy over tongues in the first 19 verses of 1 Corinthians 14 and includes the OT citation "not by way of Scriptural proof, but in solemn asseveration of what [Paul] has intimated. . . respecting the inferiority of Glossolalia. . . . The passage of Isaiah reveals a principle applying to all such modes of speech on God's part."³⁹ Conzelmann holds that Paul is extending his train of thought as follows:

Scripture predicts speaking in tongues as a God-given sign, but this sign has no attention paid to it. Thus the tone is first of all critical, and does not agree with the previous train of thought. For Paul's argument so far had been based on the fact that men cannot understand speaking with tongues, whereas in the quotation it is based on the fact that they will not understand. The application which follows [v 22] operates once more with the idea of inability, thus the quotation is made use of only for the one thought, that speaking with tongues is a "sign" (namely, for unbelievers).⁴⁰

Conzelmann is correct that Paul is seeing tongues as a sign of divine judgment on unbelievers; Paul himself says as much in v 22. But Paul also demonstrates in v 22 that he is dealing with the same topic he has discussed all along: the relative value of tongues over against prophecy. In other words, tongues were a sign, but in the OT context they possessed only the negative value of rebuke unto judgment.

³⁸ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971) 132-33. "According to Jewish usage, the whole OT can be so designated." Conzelmann, 242. Paul uses *ὁ νόμος* to refer to Scripture at large in Rom 3:19, and John at 10:34. G. G. Findlay, *Apostles, Romans, First Corinthians, Expositor's Greek Testament* (ed, W. Robertson Nicoll; 5 vols.; n.p., n.d.; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 2.909. Hereafter cited as Findlay. Also cf. F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 330.

³⁹ Findlay, 2.909.

⁴⁰ Conzelmann, 242. Cf. Kidner, "Paul's quotation of v 11 in 1 Cor 14.21 is thus a reminder . . . that unknown tongues are not God's greeting to a believing congregation but His rebuke to an unbelieving one." Cited in Grudem, 387.

Paul's argument proceeds further than that, as we see in his reintroduction of the theme of prophecy versus tongues in v 22.

Excursus on σημεῖον. It is obvious that Paul is citing Isa 28:11-12 to show that stammering lips and other tongues are a "sign" (σημεῖον) for unbelievers. But what are we to understand by "sign"? The major divisions among commentators come over whether we are to take "sign" in a positive or negative sense.⁴¹ J. Ruef, for example, sees "sign" in the NT context as referring to the positive presence of God at conversion,⁴² whereas K. Stendahl holds it had an almost completely negative connotation for Paul--a "mere sign" that only led to hardening and unbelief.⁴³ Most commentators will follow Stendahl and affirm that "sign" in this context applies to one of judgment (as in Isa 20:3, Deut 28:45-49, or Luke 2:34), that it is not a means by which one comes to know God but a means of hardening hearts.⁴⁴ Ruef has two problems with this approach. First, in the NT context the people did not have a chance to understand what the speaker meant; in the OT context they had rejected the clear preaching of the prophet; and the Israelites had not obeyed. Second, tongues were viewed by the Corinthians as a positive sign, a sign of the presence of God's Spirit. Paul does not seem to be arguing his case in such a way as to allow the unbelievers to be shut off in their disbelief but rather to hold out hope for their repentance (vv 24-25).⁴⁵

Perhaps the best way to view the concept of "sign" is to take it as a neutral term connoting evidence of divine activity whether for judgment or blessing. In the OT context of Deut 28:45-49, tongues of other nations were an unmistakable sign of God's disapproval of Israel for their disobedience; tongues were a sign of the curse that would follow upon their disregarding the law as given to Moses. "*All these curses*" were to overtake them if they disobeyed:

and they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed forever, because thou servedst not the Lord thy God. . . . The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth. . . a nation whose tongue thou shalt-not understand. . . (KJV-emphasis mine).

John refers to the glorious miracles of Jesus as "signs"; Luke records how the birth of Messiah would be a sign which would be spoken

⁴¹ Roberts, 199.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Stendahl, 115. Stendahl cites 1 Cor 1:22, Rom 4:11, 2 Cor 12:12, Rom 15:19, and 2 Thess 2:9 as evidence of Paul's negative attitude toward "mere signs." Only in John are miracles called "signs." Ibid.

⁴⁴ Cf. TDNT, S.v. "σημεῖον," by K. H. Rengsdorf for an illustration of this viewpoint.

⁴⁵ J. S. Ruef, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 151-52.

against. Jesus, however, uses the word in the negative sense when a wicked generation keeps asking him for a sign: "the sign of the prophet Jonah" is a bewildering puzzle to his audience. "Sign" like "miracle" or "parable" can be a vehicle for light or darkness depending on the spiritual receptivity of the hearer. If we interpret sign in this neutral sense, we will have no difficulty with "prophecy is [a sign] for believers" (if indeed those words are elliptically supplied by Paul in v 22). In the NT context, a "sign" of God's activity could well be used in a positive sense, just as in John's gospel--to lead people to Christ. Both Paul and the Corinthians seem to be aware of this.⁴⁶

14:21 (continued) So Paul sets Isa 28:11-12 in a context in which he seems to be asking the Corinthians to examine what the law (Scripture itself) says about the sign value of tongues: they were prophesied by Isaiah as a sign of judgment on unbelievers (in the OT context, children of Israel who had turned a deaf ear to God's petitions for obedience and offers of rest).⁴⁷ But what sort of tongues do we mean? Ἐν ἑτερογλώσσοις "by men of foreign tongues," in the Isaiah context refers to uninterpreted human languages that fall upon the ears of unrepentant Hebrews as "stammering." But γλῶσσα in Corinth refers to unintelligible utterances spoken in the context of Christian worship (vv 1-6). Whether they refer to human languages (Acts 2) or mysterious, unintelligible tongues of angels (1 Cor 13:1) is a matter of debate to commentators. R. H. Gundry holds, against what he considers to be an overwhelming consensus, that the tongues in Corinth were bona fide foreign languages. He notes that the majority of NT and Greek literary references refer to meaningful human speech (used in that sense 30 times in the LXX alone). Similarly, outside of the passages in question (Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 14), the biblical Greek contains only two references to unintelligible speech as γλῶσσα (Isa 29:24, 32:4 [LXX]).⁴⁸ In the context of our passage, however, Paul has already written of speaking with the tongues of men or of angels in 13:1. Gundry takes this reference as hypothetical, not necessarily

⁴⁶ For treatments on signs as positive or negative in Scripture see Grudem, 387-92 and Fee, 681-82.

⁴⁷ Sweet feels that Isa 28:11-12 had been used by the Corinthians "to justify glossolalia against Jewish aspersions" and Paul turns the tables on them. Sweet, 244.

⁴⁸ R. H. Gundry, "'Ecstatic Utterance' (NEB)?" *JTS* 17 (1966) 299-300. Against this view one might argue why an unbeliever, upon hearing someone speaking in what was obviously an unfamiliar foreign language, would conclude that the speaker was crazy. It seems that what we have in Corinth was an unusual manifestation of the Spirit of God. Cf. C. H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 89-91; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 1:33; Grosheide, 332. For the opposite view see J. G. Davies, "Pentecost and Glossolalia," *JTS* (1952) 228-31. Conzelmann maintains a neutral position, 242, n. 19.

rooted in facts as they were. But prophecy, knowledge, faith, giving up of possessions to feed the poor, and being martyred (13:1-2) were surely not hypothetical to the Corinthians. Tongues at Corinth seem to have constituted a spiritual manifestation that needed spiritual interpretation and mature control. We cannot prove conclusively from the evidence we have that they were indeed speaking in a heavenly language unknown by men; neither can we prove the reverse, but such a singular, mysterious working of God's Spirit would not have to conform to the lexical norms familiar to men. It seems more plausible, judging from the context, that tongues of men and angels were in danger of being abused, that unbelievers considered the Christians mad in exercising the gift, that tongues had meaning but only when translated, and that Paul himself had the gift but wanted to do the thing which edified the believers and instructed the unbelievers in love: prophesy.

There are major differences between $\gamma\lambda\omega\sigma\sigma\alpha$ in the Isaiah passage and in Corinth. The uninterpreted Assyrian language of Isaiah 28 was a form of punishment for unbelief.⁴⁹ The uninterpreted (heavenly?) language of Paul's day was occurring among believers in an attitude of worship. One represents God speaking through the heathen to his own unbelieving people; the other represents the Holy Spirit speaking through a believing Christian to edify himself or, upon interpretation, the entire church fellowship. The common link seems to be the impact upon unbelievers: untranslated tongues in both instances effectively shut off the unbeliever in his unbelief. In Isaiah's day this had constituted a judgment of God, but Paul seems to be asking the Corinthians if they desire to use their spiritual gifts to bring the same judgment upon the unbelievers among them. It is obvious from vv 25-26 which Paul prefers: "Let all things be done for edification." Findlay well summarizes the arguments thus far advanced:

God spoke to Israel through the strange Assyrian tongue in retribution, not to confirm their faith but to consummate their unbelief. The Glossolalia may serve a similar melancholy purpose in the Church. This analogy

⁴⁹ Robertson and Plummer note that the connection of the Isaiah passage in 1 Corinthians is difficult and propose the following logic on the part of Paul: "I have pointed out that tongues are a blessed experience to the individual believer, and that, if interpreted, they may benefit the believing congregation. Tongues have a further use, as a sign to unbelievers; not a convincing, saving sign, but a judicial sign. Just as the disobedient Jews, who refused to listen to the clear and intelligible language of foreign invaders, so those who now fail to believe the Gospel are chastised by hearing wonderful sounds which they cannot understand.' If this is correct, we may compare Christ's use of parables to veil His meaning from those who could not or would not receive it." Robertson and Plummer, 316.

does not support any more than that of vv. 10f the notion that the tongues of Corinth were foreign languages.⁵⁰

So we conclude that Paul either renders the Isaiah text freely or draws upon a now unknown Greek text-form. In so doing he changes the subject of the main verb from the "he" (YHWH) of the MT and "they" of the LXX to "I" (YHWH). He omits the former part of Isa 28:12 and thus condenses his argument to focus on the direct disobedience to God. His additions at the close of Isa 28:12 underscore this point. Paul's second clause, *καὶ οὐδ' οὕτως εἰσακούσονται μου*, is based upon the Isaiah verse but with a consideration increase in force, signaled by the addition of *οὕτως* and *μου*. His use of *εἰσακούσονται* is interesting: the word shares the meaning of *ὑπακούω* in the language of the LXX and classical Greek and carries the force of "obey" or "to hear with attention or effect."⁵¹ Paul seems to be rendering *עֲלֵמָה* in the full OT covenantal sense. If they did not obey, they had not heard--and it was God, not man, they spurned. The language of the original has been condensed and adapted by Paul, and the effect is much stronger than the LXX form *οὐκ ἠθέλησαν ἀκούειν*.⁵² The point is not that they were unwilling to listen to those of stammering tongue (LXX) but that even though YHWH himself made the appeal, they would not hearken to me, says the Lord.

14:22 This verse represents the major problem of interpretation in the chapter. When taken as an application to the Corinthian situation, the illustrations seem flatly to contradict the assertions.⁵³ Most commentators take the verse to represent the Corinthian situation and seek by grammatical or lexical means to account for the seeming inconsistencies. There is no consensus, and the approaches offered seem to be as numerous as the commentators themselves.

One approach (L. Morris, Hering, S. L. Johnson, and Findlay) suggests that Paul is making a distinction between two kinds of *ἄπιστοι*: those who have heard the word and rejected it (v 22), and those who

⁵⁰ Findlay, 910.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Robertson and Plummer, 316-17.

⁵³ In other words, how do we reconcile "tongues are a sign. . .not for believers" (v 22) to 14:4 where the believer is edified by tongues, and "prophecy is not for unbelievers" (v 22) to 14:24-25 where an unbeliever worships God as the result of all prophesying? Cf. Grudem: "Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 14:20-25 have often seemed perplexing, primarily because he calls tongues a sign for unbelievers (v 22), but then seems to discourage the use of tongues when unbelievers are present (v 23). Similarly, he says that the use of prophecy is for believers (v 22), but then encourages the use of prophecy when unbelievers are present (vv 24-25)." Grudem, 381.

are about to become believers (vv 23-25).⁵⁴ Roberts takes offense at the shift in semantic meaning; for ἄπιστοι and σημεῖον by such approaches; for example, Barrett takes prophecy and tongues as negative signs of judgment and, in Roberts' view, cuts v 22 off from its context, thus producing an even greater impasse. Ruef explains v 22 by saying that tongues are a sign to unbelievers in that they are participants in God's Spirit, which Roberts feels is a contradiction in terms.⁵⁵

Sweet feels that Paul is deliberately exploiting the ambiguity of ἄπιστος. Paul warns the Corinthians that according to the law, tongues are meant as a sign *against* (*dativus incommodi*) unbelievers (see note 55 below); therefore, for those who reject God's simple message, tongues are not as the Corinthians seem to assume--a sign for the benefit of believers, but one which will harden the unbelievers. On the other hand, prophecy is a sign for believers in the effect it has on unbelievers. Sweet concludes:

On this view he is deliberately exploiting the ambiguity of ἄπιστος ('disbeliever', v 22; 'unbeliever', vv 23-24) and of the dative, but such shifts of meaning are common enough in Paul. There is no need to suppose he genuinely thinks that tongues are intended by God to harden unbelievers. The case in verse 23 is hypothetical; his concern is with the Corinthians.⁵⁶

B. C. Johanson handles the problem of v 22 by taking the verse as a rhetorical question which Paul has formulated by inference from Isa 28:11-12. He sees it as being placed in the mouth of an imaginary opponent and intended by Paul to represent the childish reasoning of the glossolalists which he has already disparaged in v 20. Taken thus, w 23-25 could be seen as Paul's rebuttal to the absurdity of their charge (v 22).⁵⁷ O. Robertson sees σημεῖον as referring to Deut 28:49, a sign of covenantal curse or blessing, and concludes that the same sign could then serve as a judgment on unbelievers--a covenantal curse.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid. Hering, 152-53. L Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids; InterVarsity, 1958) 195-96.

⁵⁵ Roberts, 200. He reconciles the problem by following B. Anderson to say that σημεῖον refers to "divine or spiritual activity" that communicates that God is present and at work (cf. Isa 7:14--the Immanuel sign). Ibid. Cf. E. B. Allo, "Ici σημεῖον est simplement un signe de l'activité divine, prodigieuse ou non, donne en faveur ou en défaveur de quelqu'un, avec datif commodi ou incommodi." E. B. Allo, *Première épître aux Corinthiens* (Paris: n.p., 1934), 365. Allo takes the Greek to refer to a dative of advantage or disadvantage, where τοῖς could be translated "for" or "against." Sweet, 242. Fee, 681.

⁵⁶ Sweet, 242.

⁵⁷ B. C. Johanson, "Tongues, A Sign for Unbelievers?: A Structural and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians XIV. 20-25," *NTS* 25 (January 1979) 202.

⁵⁸ O. P. Robertson, "Tongues: Sign of Covenantal Curse and Blessing," *WTJ* 38 (1975) 44, 46.

But tongues would serve simultaneously as a sign of covenantal blessing as God poured out his spirit on all flesh. Tongues are "for unbelievers" in that they give a divine warning to unbelieving Israel--God has been true to his word in Deut 28:49 and brought the covenantal curse to pass. Thus the tongues give witness to God's judgment on unrepentant Israel.⁵⁹ Robertson resolves the conflict in v 22 by noting that there is a general difference between tongues and prophecy. Tongues are a "sign;" prophecy is not ("prophecy is for believers"--Robertson does not supply the words "for a sign"). They are an indicator whereas prophecy serves as a communicator; i.e., tongues call attention to the mighty acts of God whereas prophecy calls the unbeliever to repentance and faith.⁶⁰ Barrett likewise notes that Paul uses Isa 8:14 and 28:16 in other contexts to demonstrate possible positive and negative effects of the same gift.⁶¹ Stendahl takes issue with Barrett who understands "as a sign" from the first clause and reads "prophecy as a sign not for the unbelievers." Stendahl feels that the resolution of the problem lies in the omission of the supplied words. He holds that Paul is arguing that according to the law glossolalia is a mere sign, incapable of leading unbelievers to faith. Of course, to the believer glossolalia is not such a sign for he has faith and has heard God's word. Prophecy is *toward* faith (here Stendahl seems to construe the dative of reference, lessening the idea of personal emphasis) and not *toward* the hardening of unbelief.⁶² (Emphasis mine.)

The final problem we must treat is the relationship of the Isaiah context (divine judgment upon the unbelieving) to the Corinthian

⁵⁹ It is to be noted here that in the larger context of Isa 28:11-12 is found "Behold I lay in Zion a stone. . ." (Isa 28:16).

⁶⁰ Robertson, 52. But he does not as adequately account for the reverse statements "prophecy is not for unbelievers" and "tongues are not a sign for believers" in the context and why the illustrations seem to contradict them. Sweet holds that these phrases we put in for rhetorical balance and that Paul's main point is not value in general but sign value. Sweet, 244, n. 2.

⁶¹ Cited in T. C. Smith, D. Moody, and R B. Brown, *Acts-1 Corinthians*, Broadman Bible Commentary (ed. C.] Allen; 12 vols.; Nashville: Broadman, 1969-1973), 10.380.

⁶² Stendahl, 116, n. 9. He notes the RSV translation, "tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers," overlooks the wording of εἰς σημεῖον, "for a sign." (Cf. BAG, "with the vocation, use, or end indicated... 1 Cor 14:22," S.v. "εἰς.") Stendahl reads the first clause "Thus [according to the quotation from Isa. 28:11] glossolalia becomes [Elvat εἰς] a (mere) sign not for believers but for unbelievers." Stendahl, 115, n. 7. This writer feels that the expression can best be accounted for by Semitic influence; that is, in the NT we often find LXX quotes or Semitic phrases using εἰς plus the accusative in place of the predicate noun. Blass notes that the LXX uses it fairly consistently as a translation of 7. It would thus be "tongues are a sign" according to older Greek idioms under Semitic influence. A T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 457-58.

situation in which Paul seems anxious that the unbelievers have a chance to convert. Those commentators who want to emphasize Paul's holding out of grace toward unbelievers have trouble with the Isaiah context and often conclude that Paul is using Isa 28:11-12 irrespective of the context of divine judgment.⁶³ On the other hand, those who hold that Paul cites the Isaiah passage for its historical significance have problems explaining his application in vv 23-24, as it appears to draw the opposite conclusions from v 22. Commentators who take this form of reasoning include Bruce, Rengstorf, Allo, and J. MacGorman. Allo is illustrative of the attempt to make the Isaiah quotation serve the Corinthian context. The Corinthian unbelievers should realize by observing tongues that they are in the same situation as the unbelievers of Isaiah's day--a sign that God is abandoning unbelieving Israel and allowing it to return to Gentile domination.⁶⁴ Sweet takes issue with this and holds it is difficult to conclude that Paul could have expected his hearers to be so familiar with the Isaiah context and to read so much out of two isolated verses. He notes that although Paul does not seem to be drawing the quotation "from the blue," he does not seem to be using it in the context with which they would have been familiar; and it "points to a rather different interpretation."⁶⁵ We will attempt to address this problem in the final section.

IV. The Relationship Between Isa 28:11-12 and 1 Cor 14:21-22: A Tentative Conclusion

Now that the major interpretive issues have been examined, we must attempt to draw our findings together in such a way as to draw out, not further obscure, Paul's meaning. Several presuppositions are made: first, this approach assumes that Paul understood the judgment context of Isa 28:11-12 and that in applying the passage, he is aware that tongues were a sign of judgment upon hardened unbelievers. Second, no appeal will be made to unannounced shifts in grammar (such as from dative of advantage to disadvantage) unless warranted by the context. Third, if we are forced to reinterpret a word--"unbeliever," for example--it will be only because context demands it.

⁶³ Michel, pp 167-68. Michel sees it as an example of rabbinic teaching taken out of original context. Robertson and Plummer argue that tongues are not a sign but are intended only to serve as such. Robertson and Plummer, 317. They do conclude that this "sign by proxy" is for judgment rather than salvation.

⁶⁴ Allo, 365-66.

⁶⁵ Sweet, 242. A Strobel, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther, Zurcher Bibelkommentare* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1989) 220. Strobel sees Paul as writing "ungenau nach rabbinischer Manier."

Let us first examine the common elements in the OT and NT contexts. Both passages involve a *call to maturity* and link the concept of knowledge with that of babies: "Do not be *children* in your *thinking* yet in evil be babes" (1 Cor 14:20); "Whom would he [YHWH] teach *knowledge*? ...Those just *weaned from milk*?" (Isa 28:9; emphasis mine.) The basic difference between the contexts is that Isaiah's words come ironically, implying that the people are beyond help and only the babies would bother to listen. Paul is directing his admonition primarily to the believers and is trying to get them to show signs of spiritual maturity. In other words, Paul and Isaiah have different purposes in mind, suited to their contexts. I would like to propose that Paul is presenting two parallel arguments: one based upon the OT context (1 Cor 14:21-22) and one upon the NT context (1 Cor 14:23-24). Whereas Isaiah's "call to maturity" constitutes a turning of unbelievers over to divine wrath because of disobedience, Paul's "call to maturity" constitutes a call to mature Christianity on the part of the Corinthians with the opposite result in mind: to bring the unbelievers to Christ.

Another common element is unintelligible language which in Isaiah's context is a human language serving as an unmistakable sign of God's wrath or, after Robertson, a sign of a covenantal curse. In Corinth the unintelligible language was a grace gift to believers and a sign of God's presence and new covenant; it only shut off unbelievers in their unbelief if left uninterpreted--showing them to be aliens and foreigners and causing them to conclude the Christians were mad (14:23). In the Isaiah context hardening as a result of unintelligible tongues was a divine result of having rejected God's clear message. In the Corinthian context the hardening of unbelievers is an undesired result of the selfish, unloving actions of immature believers. These unbelievers had not had the chance to hear God's clear message (14:1-19) but should be given the chance (14:23-26). The believers in Isaiah's day were nonexistent in Ephraim; that is why Isaiah has God preaching through him in the nursery. Perhaps these would be the "weary" ones of the land who would accept God's rest and covenant terms--those who would hear and obey. In Corinth the believers were not OT Israelites but Christians; they were those who had responded to God's message of grace in Jesus Christ. As Vv 24-25 suggest, some of the ἄπιστοι in Corinth would respond if given a chance. So the unbelievers in Isaiah's day were Israelites who had defiantly rejected God's covenant rest in order to forge illegitimate alliances politically and spiritually. They were entrenched, hardened rebels against God. In Corinth the unbelievers are present in the services (14:16, 23-25) but will not hear the clear message "if all speak in tongues" (v 23) and will be shut off in unbelief, concluding "they are mad." If, however,

"all prophesy," the unbeliever is converted, falls down convicted and worships God (v 25). We are thus forced by the context to reinterpret "unbeliever" in this manner. "Sign," conceived as a neutral manifestation of God's activity, may like "miracle" or "parable" be a blessing to one who believes or a curse to one who rejects. Paul cites only the negative function of the sign from Isaiah 28 and asks rhetorically if that is really what the tongues faction desires to accomplish with these unbelievers.

Paul cites Isa 28:11-12 as an OT example of the judgmental nature of uninterpreted tongues upon the covenant people of God, the implication being that they were under the law and had forfeited the grace of God through disobedience. 1 Cor 14:22 in its entirety is perfectly adaptable to the OT context and can be taken as a midrash on v 21 (the Isaiah quote) to prove the point that tongues can have only a damning effect when the prophecy of God goes unheeded.⁶⁶

"Tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers" explains part of the Isaiah context: under the law uninterpreted (mere) tongues served as a sign of God's judgment upon unbelievers and led to judgment and destruction. The obverse is also true (of the Isaiah context): prophecy (which had gone unheeded in Ephraim) was intended all along for those who would respond and live in obedience to it. The purpose of the positive prophecy in the Isaiah quote had been to promote mercy and lead the weary to live in covenant fellowship with God. The OT quote (v 21) and midrash (v 22) do not apply to the Corinthian situation;--and this is precisely Paul's point--they are under grace! His implied conclusion, proved in v 22 and signaled in the text by ὡστε, can be summed up as follows: therefore, in the OT context (in the law) prophecy is superior to tongues. Tongues in Isaiah were just a sign of judgment unto destruction, but prophecy was intended to lead believers into the blessings of the covenant, as indeed it would have, had anyone in Ephraim listened to God and obeyed Isaiah.

Paul's immediate appeal to the Corinthian context implies, "Now you do not want to use tongues to destroy people, do you?" (cf. 1 Cor 13:1). "Therefore" (οὖν) signals a shift in context. He cites two contemporary hypothetical illustrations to the Corinthians to show that since their situation is opposite (not preaching condemnation but repentance

⁶⁶ Cf. Roberts, "It is tempting. . . to treat the succeeding verses as an exposition of this quotation, rather than a further comment on the circumstances at Corinth, which are dealt with in the rest of Ch.14. ff Roberts, 201. Fee argues well for a chiasmic structure in v 22 (ABB' A') as application for an exhortation (v 20) backed in rabbinical fashion by an appeal to an OT text (v 21). Seen in this fashion, vv 23-25 serve as concluding illustrations. Fee, 677, 681. (See appendix 2.)

unto salvation, not law but grace), their priorities should be opposite; and they should therefore cease exalting tongues over prophecy.

Seen in this way, a rhetorical disjoint occurs between vv 22 and 23, and Paul begins making a parallel argument in light of their changed situation. His first illustration is: "If all speak in [uninterpreted] tongues," the unbeliever will conclude "you are mad." This is from the Corinthians' own standpoint an undesired result. The unbeliever, thus hardened, has had no chance for grace, no opportunity to hear the gospel, as mature Christians would notice.

On the other hand, "if all prophesy," this same unbeliever is "convinced by all" and "judged by all" (v 24). He falls down and worships God and bears witness that God is truly inhabiting the praises of his people (v 25). This is the desired result in the new context, but the implied conclusion reached (vv 23-25) is that *prophecy is superior* to tongues in the grace context as well. Uninterpreted tongues only isolate and alienate unbelievers while edifying the individual believer, but prophecy both edifies the people of God and convicts unbelievers. Paul's conclusion is therefore inescapable: "For you can *all prophesy* one by one, so that *all may learn* and all may be encouraged" (v 31; emphasis mine.) If tongues are used, they must be interpreted (v 28); if not, let the would-be abusers remain silent. So Paul has, with one argument drawn from the OT context plus an appended midrash for the benefit of his non-Jewish converts, argued that prophecy is superior to tongues.⁶⁷ Then, turning right around and drawing an example from the Corinthians' own situation, he has proved the same. In v 37 he seals the argument with an appeal to apostolic authority: "If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord."

Having thus spoken, he summarizes the point he has made concerning the relative value of tongues and prophecy: "Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order" (vv 39-40). This is what it means to be "mature in understanding" and "babes in malice."

⁶⁷ For treatment of this verse as midrash see Martin, 72, and Strobel, 220. Ellis sees it as an application of the *peshar* method of application, going behind the Greek to a treatment of the Hebrew ur-text. "[Paul's] idea of a quotation was not a worshipping of the letter or 'parroting' of the text; neither was it an eisegesis which arbitrarily imposed a foreign meaning upon the text. It was rather, in his eyes, a quotation-exposition, a Midrash *peshar*, which drew from the text the meaning originally implanted there by the Spirit and expressed that meaning in the most appropriate words and phrases known to him." Ellis, 146.

APPENDIX 1
A COMPARISON OF TEXT-FORMS

MT -A.D. 1009 (IQIs ^a -150-125 B.C.) Isa. 28:11-12 Because כִּי	NT -A.D. 55-56 1 Cor. 14:21 --	LXX -ca. 400 B.C. Isa. 28:11-12 --
With בְּ	With 'Εν	Through διὰ
Stammerings (of) לְעִגְיָ	Other Languages ἑτερογλώσσοις	Disparagement φασλισμόν (ου) Luc
Speech, Lip פֶּשֶׁף	--	-Of Lips χειλέων
And וְ	And καί	--
With בְּ	With ἐν	By διὰ
A Tongue לְשׁוֹן	Lips χείλεσιν	A Language γλώσσης
Strange, Alien תִּהְיֶה אֲ	Of Strangers (Other) Others ἑτέρων (ἑτέροις) Ⲁ, B A P ⁴⁶	Another (Crafty) Deceitful ἑτέρας (δόλιας) Sah, 538
--	--	Because That? For? ὅτι (ἔτι) (--) RCBaSah, HieLuc
He (YHWH) will speak יְדַבֵּר	I (YHWH) will speak λαλήσω	They will speak λαλήσουσι
To this people אֶל-הַעָמָּה הַזֹּאת	To this people τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ	To this people τῷ λαῷ τούτῳ
Unto whom אֲשֶׁר	--	--
He (YHWH) Said אָמַר	--	Saying λέγοντες
Unto them אֶל-יְהוָה (אֶל-יְהוָה)	--	Unto Him (Them)(-) αὐτῷ αὐτοῖς ΛQ Sc R C BS*BA Luc

APPENDIX 1 (cont.)
A COMPARISON OF TEXT-FORMS

MT-A.D.1009 (IQIs ^a -150-125 B.C.)	NT-A.D. 55-56	LXX-ca. 400 B.C.
Isa. 28:11-12	1 Cor. 14:21	Isa. 28:11-12 c
This	--	This (is)
תָּאֵל (תָּאֵל)		τοῦτο
The rest, quietude	--	The rest
הַקְּנוּתָהּ		τὸ ἀνάπαυμα
(You-pl) Cause to Rest	--	--
וְהַנְּיָוִי	--	--
(obj.) The weary, exhausted לְעָרִיבָה	--	To the hungry
And this (is)	--	τῷ πεινῶντι
וְהַתְּרָפָה (וְהַתְּרָפָה)	--	And this (is)
The repose	--	καὶ τοῦτο
הַתְּרָפָה	--	The Destruction
		Battle Array Rest
		τὸ συντρίμμα RCBaTh
		τὸ σύνταγμα ἢ ἡρεμία
		Luc σ'
And not	And even so, not	And not
וְלֹא (וְלֹא)	καὶ οὐδ' οὕτως	καὶ οὐκ
They were willing	--	They willed
וְרָצוּ (וְרָצוּ)	--	ἠθέλησαν (ἠθέλαν, ον)
		S Luc Tht
To hear	Will they hear	To hear
וְשָׁמוּ	εἰσακούσονται	ἀκούειν (ἀκούσαι)
--	Me (YHWH)	Tht
--	μου	--
--	Says (the) Lord (YHWH)	--
	λέγει κύριος	

Luc= Lucianic versions

Sah= Sahidic version

R = Rahlfs edition

C = Gottingen critical ed.

Ba = Bagster's edition

Q = Marchalianus VI^c

N = Sinaiticus NT

S = Sinaiticus

Hie = Hieronymus

B = Yaticanus IV^c

σ' = Symmachus

Tht = Theodotion

A = Alexandrinus V^c*original hand IV^c^ccorrector IV/V^c

APPENDIX 2
A CALL TO MATURITY

Thesis: "Do not be *children* in your *thinking*,
yet in evil be babes" 1 Cor. 14:20

("Whom would He teach *knowledge*? . . . those just
weaned from milk?" Isa 28:9)

OT CONTEXT-(in the law")

1. call to maturity: unheeded by Israel
2. stammering lips: unintelligible human language leading to hardening; a sign of God's judgment (28:11)
3. unbelievers: Israelites who had heard God's clear message and rejected it. Destined for judgment (28:12-13)
4. (believers: Israelites who would hear and obey the prophet, thus obtaining rest)
5. sign: evidence of God's activity (negative)

Argument I (Neg) Isa. 28:11-12 (14:21)
and Midrash (14:22)

- A (ὤστυε) Unintelligible tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers: they are (in Isaiah) only a sign of God's judgment leading to hardening and destruction (unde-sired result in Corinth)
- B. But prophecy is for believers not unbelievers: Isaiah's positive prophecy was intended for those who would hear and obey it, not spurn it as nothing. Led to rest and relationship with God (desired result)
- C. (Implied conclusion: therefore in the OT context [vv. 21-22] prophecy is superior to tongues: Tongues were just a negative sign unto destruction and exile, but prophecy was intended to build up believers if Ephraim had heeded)
- D. (Implied connection: You do not want to destroy unbelievers, do you? [1 Cor. 13])

NT CONTEXT--("under grace")

1. call to maturity: contingent upon obedience to Paul
2. glossolalia: unintelligible (angelic?) language leading to alienation, hardening of unbelievers when left untranslated (14:23). A grace gift of God's presence
3. unbelievers: Corinthian Jews and Gentiles who had not heard the gospel clearly. Able to repent and believe (14:24-25)
4. believers: Christians
5. sign: evidence of God's activity (negative or positive)

Argument II (POS) The Contemporary
Situation (14:23-25)

- A (οὐν) If all speak with (uninterpreted) tongues: the unbeliever concludes "you are mad"; as a foreigner he is hardened and isolated in his unbelief with no chance for a clear hearing of gospel (undesired result)
- B. But if all prophecy: the unbeliever is convicted by all, called to account by all, falls on face, worships God, and concludes "God is truly among you (desired result)
- C. (Implied conclusion: *therefore in the present[NTJ context [23-25] prophecy superior to tongues*. Tongues left untranslated only isolate and confuse unbelievers, but prophecy both builds up the people of God and converts unbelievers)
- D. Conclusion: "You can all prophesy one by one so that all may learn and all may be exhorted" (14:31)

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

The Criswell College

4010 Gaston Ave.

Dallas, TX 75246

www.criswell.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu