

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

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What is it? Upon whom did it come? Should we expect it in our time? These are questions for which we shall seek Bible answers in this treatment of the subject.

Let it be stated at the very outset of this discussion that the words, “Holy Ghost” and “Holy Spirit,” in the King James version of the Bible are accepted by this writer to be one and the same. There will be no distinction made between them, and reference will always be made by use of the term “Holy Spirit” only. All reputable scholars of the original Bible languages will support this position.

The subject of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is first introduced in the New Testament by John the Baptist. In Matthew 3:11, in speaking of the entrance of Jesus Christ upon the scene, he states, **“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:”** In Mark’s reference to this, Mark 1:8, he omits reference to the baptism of fire, as does John in John 1:33. However Luke speaks of it in the same sense as does Matthew (Luke 3:16).

Both references, in Matthew and Luke, which refer also to a baptism of fire, make it quite clear in the following verse that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of fire are two different events, experienced by two different kinds of people, at two different time periods; and are only mentioned by John the Baptist at the same time because they have the same administrator – Jesus Christ, whom he was introducing. Upon this discussion, therefore, the baptism of fire will have no bearing.

What is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Just what did John mean when he said of Jesus, “He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit”? This is the crucial question in this whole discussion, and it can be best answered by finding what Jesus, Himself, said about it.

On the day that Jesus ascended back to the Father, He was assembled with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. This was some ten days prior to the great Pentecost experience, and Jesus said to them, **“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”** Acts 1:5. There can be no doubt that Jesus and John the Baptist were referring to the same event. John mentioned it in connection with his baptismal ministry, and Jesus mentioned the two in the same connection.

We have determined for us here the administrator and the agent in this baptism—Jesus is the administrator, and the Holy Spirit the agent. We need now to determine the subject—who is going to be baptized?

If we can determine to whom Jesus addressed His promise of Holy Spirit Baptism in Acts 1:5 we will have the answer: “...**ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost...**”. Though the apostles are mentioned in Acts 1:2, it is clear that He was not speaking to them alone. Acts 1:4 states “**And, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith he*, ye have heard of me.**” In Acts 1:15 we find that as many as one hundred and twenty came down from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem to await that promise. This, then, is the group of disciples to whom Jesus addressed these words.

But this group of disciples was more than just a loosely assembled crowd. This is the assembly with whom Jesus discussed kingdom affairs after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). It was the assembly that Jesus commanded to wait in Jerusalem after His ascension for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4). This was the assembly to whom, Jesus addressed His commission to evangelize the world (Acts 1:8). This is the assembly that elected Matthias to the bishoprick vacated by the suicide of Judas (Acts 1:23-26). This assembly had originated with John’s baptism, and had been a company throughout the public ministry of Jesus (Acts 1:21-22). This assembly, with its additions, is held without question after the day of Pentecost to be the church of Jesus Christ, and was clearly recognised by Jesus to be such during His public ministry. It was this assembly to whom Jesus said, “...**ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.**” Acts 1:5, and which ten days later, was indeed so baptised on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-2).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was the baptism of a (commissioned) assembly, not individual baptism. Let us examine it: “**And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.**” Acts 2:1-2. What actually happened here?

First of all, the company of believers to whom Jesus had said some ten days precious, “...**ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.**”, were all assembled together on this occasion. Second, the heavenly messenger, which was the only source for the sound they heard, engulfed the room where this (commissioned) company was assembled. This action completely submerged this congregation in the Holy Spirit—and this constitutes

baptism. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:1-2 **“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;”**

Peter, in referencing to the Pentecostal experience, while reporting to the Jerusalem church his experience as Caesarea, says that the experience brought to his mind the Lord’s promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:15-16). This experience then at Pentecost was indeed the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit. It was a congregational experience, and not an individual experience. It had been promised to the church in assembly, and it was experienced by the church in assembly.

“Speaking in Tongues” Not a Part of It

Another very important matter should be noted here. The experience of speaking in “tongues” was not here necessarily an evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There were two associated events here. The Holy Spirit came upon the congregation as the sound engulfed the room, **“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost...”** Acts 2:4. Baptism of the Holy Spirit was always a congregational experience. Note Acts 2:3 **“And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.”**

What Really Happened at Pentecost?

We need to clear our thinking just here as to what really took place with regard to the Holy Spirit on this day of Pentecost. In the first place this was not the original coming of the Holy Spirit onto the earthly scene. The Holy Spirit had been here all along. In Nehemiah 9:20 we are told that the Holy Spirit was with the people of Israel in their journeys in the wilderness. In Numbers 27:18 the Lord told Moses that the Holy Spirit was in Joshua. In 2 Kings 2:9 Elisha asked for a double portion of the Holy Spirit, which had been with the prophet Elijah. David’s prayer of Psalm 51:10 certainly implies that the normal experience of those who trust in God was that His Holy Spirit should dwell in them. Indeed in Psalm 139:7 he indicates that there was no escaping the presence of the Holy Spirit. And so the abundance of evidence continues that the Holy Spirit was in the world during the Old Testament period. Those who were saved then were born of the Holy Spirit, even as now.

The Holy Spirit is mentioned frequently in the public ministry of Jesus and His disciples. What, then, is meant by the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost? This can best be answered by listening again to the words of Jesus as He told them what He was going to do.

In John 14:16-17, Jesus said to His disciples, “**And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.**”

During the public ministry of Jesus he had personally been their Comforter, being beside His company, His church, in any need that arose. He had been their guide, their authority, their administrator. Now He is going back to the Father, and He promises that the Holy Spirit will be sent to them in this capacity. He repeats this promise in John 16:7. As He was preparing to leave, He tells them how the Holy Spirit would make His appearance in capacity—by baptizing the assembly (Acts 1:4-5).

Thus, what actually happened on the day of Pentecost was a change of administrators for the church. Jesus left them and went to the Father, and the Holy Spirit was sent to walk alongside them as Jesus had done. This relationship was to continue throughout the age—he shall “abide with you for ever.” This relationship was initiated on the day of Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The event was accompanied by a miraculous filling of the Holy Spirit, and speaking in “tongues.”

Was It Ever Repeated?

Was this baptism ever repeated? Yes; at the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. The baptism experienced at Pentecost was upon a Jewish congregation. The three thousand people saved were added to what already existed, Acts 2:41, and it is consistently referred to as a church in the book of Acts. Their baptism by the Spirit in Jerusalem had given them divine endorsement without question. Though the commission given them had clearly included the Gentile world, there was still considerable reluctance on the part of the apostles in going to them with the gospel.

The apostle Peter was, therefore, sent on a special mission to a gentile congregation in Caesarea to officially open the door of faith to them (Acts 10). Before Peter had concluded speaking to this Gentile congregation, “...**the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.**” (Acts 10:44). This experience also was accompanied by the exercise of a miraculous demonstration, as it had been at Jerusalem (Acts 10:45). Note that the Holy Ghost fell on them, rather than a filling of the Spirit.

In defending his ministry to the Gentiles, before the brethren in Jerusalem he repeats, “...**the Holy Ghost fell on them,**” and adds, “**as on us** [the Jerusalem church] **at the beginning.**” (Acts 11:15). AS a result of this experience Peter said, “**Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.**” (Acts 11:16). Thus Peter associates both the Jerusalem experience on Pentecost, and the Gentile experience at Caesarea, with the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:5, “**For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.**” The first was an open endorsement of the New Testament church to the Jews, and the second an endorsement of the faith to the Gentiles – the Holy Spirit would make no distinction in His dealings with them: “...**to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.**”

This clarifies a reference to Spirit baptism in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that is often misused and misunderstood. The emphasis in this verse and indeed this chapter, is upon the fact that the Holy Spirit makes no difference in His dealings, whether they be Jews or Gentiles in His churches. In the verses leading up to verse 13 Paul keeps emphasizing, “the same” – “the same.” In verse 13 he states, “**For by one [the same] Spirit are we all baptized [submerged] into one [the same] body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.**” The emphasis here is not upon an act exerted upon each individual believer, but an emphasis upon the fact that the same holy Spirit deals with both Jews and Gentiles. Did not the same Holy Spirit place His endorsement upon them in the beginning of their ministries?

There are all kinds of complexities if an attempt is made to make this lone verse of Scripture teach individual Holy Spirit baptism. In the first place, nowhere in the Scriptures is there a promise, or even a mention of an individual receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If it were a valid action upon individual believers, surely somewhere we would have a clear record of an individual receiving such a baptism. Jesus did not promise it, and New Testament believers did not experience it. If so, where is the record?

In the second place, if Holy Spirit baptism is a valid experience for believers, we have a contradiction of Scripture. There is no question I think in the minds of honest readers, that the baptism commanded in the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19, is water baptism, since it is to be administered by human beings. In the case of the Jerusalem church being baptised in the Holy Spirit, Acts 2, and the Caesarea congregation, Acts 10, the act of water baptism was still administered to those who professed faith in Christ. Thus water baptism was not set aside upon the appearance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit baptism was an institutional experience. If we are to contend that Holy

Spirit baptism is also an individual experience, we must remember that Ephesians 4:5 states there is “**One Lord, one faith, one baptism,**” Water baptism and Holy Spirit Baptism would clearly be two, and would thus violate the harmony of the Scriptures. At the time Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians the act of the baptism of the Spirit upon both Jew and Gentile congregations was history. Yet baptism in water continued to be administered in the churches. Thus it is clear that there is one baptism now to be experienced – water baptism.

Summary

We have seen that there are two clear examples of Holy Spirit baptism in the Bible. These examples were the direct fulfillment of the promise of Jesus to His church, and ushered in the ministry of the church under Holy Spirit administration – to both Jew and Gentile. These examples were a one time experience, not to be repeated. The authority they carried with them remains with true churches of the New Testament order today. The capacity in which the Holy Spirit came upon those churches remains, and will remain with churches until the end of the church age.

We have also seen that miraculous demonstrations of spiritual gifts accompanied these baptisms, but were distinct from them. Such spiritual gifts have served their assignment also, and are no more to be expected today than is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

We have also determined that there is no record in the Scriptures of individual Holy Spirit baptism. It was never experienced on that basis.

For the most part, those who claim Holy Spirit baptism to be a valid act in our time make erroneous claims for it in the first place. There are basically two types of such claims. One claims that every believer is baptised by the Holy Spirit, upon conversion, into some sort of vague universal church – invisible in nature. The other claims the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a special experience to be sought after by the individual after he has been saved, and denotes some outstanding spiritual achievement – usually carrying with it certain spiritual gifts from the apostolic age.

The idea of every individual believer being baptised by the Holy Spirit upon conversion goes totally lacking for biblical support. Nowhere in the Bible is there recorded such an experience. It must, therefore, be a misappropriation of Scripture. The existence of such a mystical body into which such an experience is supposed to place an individual is equally unknown in the Scriptures. New Testament churches are very real and visible things, serving a very real purpose in this earth.

The idea that Holy Spirit baptism is an experience to be sought after by the individual believer is likewise foreign to the Scripture. Nowhere in all the Bible is the individual commanded to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Neither is there record in the Bible of an individual who ever achieved such an accomplishment as a result of his pursuit, nor demonstrated apostolic gifts as a result of such an achievement.

However, we need to be very careful, lest in setting aside these unscriptural matters we forget something most vital to the spiritual well being of a church, or an individual Christian – the filling of the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Spirit and the baptism of the Spirit are two different matters. We are told explicitly, “be filled with the Spirit.” This is not an instantaneous or miraculous experience. It is rather the normal thing that takes place in a Christian’s life as he is emptied of the works of the flesh. Our churches are suffering today because their membership is not willing to pay the price of Holy Spirit filling. Today’s Christian too often wants the power of the indwelling Spirit in his life, but is not willing to deny himself the satisfactions of the flesh so necessary to have it.

The baptism of the Spirit has been taken care of long ago and need be of no concern to us today, except to honour the responsibility it has placed upon the churches of our Lord. But the need for the filling of the Spirit should be of constant concern to us all.