

Baptism in the Spirit

What Does it Mean to be Baptized in the Holy Spirit?

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is referred to seven times in the New Testament. Four instances are found in the gospels referring to John's speaking of the Messiah: *I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.* (See Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16; John 1.33). Two other instances are found in Acts 1.5 and 11.16 and both refer back to the statement of John the Baptist. Finally, the seventh occurrence is found in 1 Corinthians 12.13 where Paul says, *for in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.*

Each occasion uses *baptized* "in the Holy Spirit" or "in one Spirit."

Note especially the teaching of Paul in the 1 Corinthians passage. Holy Spirit baptism is something **every** Christian experiences. Its purpose is not to bestow miraculous powers, but to bestow the saving work of regeneration. The miracles on Pentecost and with Cornelius (Acts 2 and 10) were exceptions, *given for evidential purposes*, and not intended to be the essence of normal Spirit baptism.

Holy Spirit baptism and water baptism are the same event. Remember Ephesians 4.5: *there is one baptism.* At the same time our bodies are baptized (washed) in water, our spirits are baptized in the Spirit.

A Conversion Experience or a Non-Conversion Experience?

Over the last two hundred years of evangelical religious history there have primarily been two views regarding Holy Spirit Baptism. These can be placed into two categories:

- A **non-conversion** experience, applying to some, but not all believers, usually with miraculous manifestations.
- A **conversion** experience, applying to all believers, with no miraculous manifestations.

As a non-conversion experience

Those who look at Holy Spirit baptism as a non-conversion experience can primarily be divided into three differing groups. Only one group out of these believes no tongues or miraculous gifts accompany the baptism.

- *Wesleyanism* comes from the teaching of the 18th century preacher John Wesley, whose followers later established the Methodist church. Wesleyans view Holy Spirit baptism as a "second work of grace," in that it removes the power of sin after initial conversion. It is also known as "perfect love" or "Christian perfection." For Wesleyans, salvation comes in two stages. First, there is *initial justification*, where a person's guilt before God is removed. Second, at a later time of crisis *entire sanctification* comes upon a person when the Holy Spirit comes to deliver the Christian from the power of sin. The Holiness movement dates back to the 1840's and 50's in

the United States and existed to highlight Wesley's teaching on entire sanctification and Christian perfection. Late 19th century author and preacher R. A. Torrey is seen as one of the key advancers of this doctrine. He wrote, *A man may be regenerated by the Holy Spirit and still not be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The purpose of Holy Spirit Baptism is to equip Christians for testimony and service.*⁵⁸ No tongues or miraculous gifts accompany the Wesleyan Holy Spirit Baptism.

- *Charismatics and Pentecostals* also view Holy Spirit baptism as a post-conversion experience with a display of miraculous signs, especially tongues. It has been said that 18th century Methodism is the mother of the 19th century holiness movement which, in turn, bore 20th century Pentecostalism.⁵⁹ Wesley's teaching on a "second work of grace" serves as the theological foundation for Pentecostalism's view of Holy Spirit baptism. What distinguishes the Charismatic Movement from its predecessors is the view that Holy Spirit Baptism is usually accompanied by a display of miraculous powers, especially tongues. *Baptism in the Holy Spirit is an empowering experience subsequent to conversion and should be sought by Christians today; and when baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs, people will speak in tongues as a 'sign' that they have received this experience.*⁶⁰
- Those in the *Restoration Movement* have also advanced what has become known as the *Two-episode* view. This views Holy Spirit Baptism as an event of history that happened only twice in the early years of the church and is something that will never happen again. In this view, Holy Spirit baptism is neither a conversion experience nor a second work of grace. It does involve miraculous powers, especially speaking in tongues.⁶¹ However, it is also consistent with the cessationist approach⁶² to miraculous spiritual gifts. J. W. McGarvey's writing has influenced many within the Churches of Christ in regard to this view. Writing about Acts 11.15-16, he writes, *In these words he identifies it as a baptism in the Holy Spirit; and these two are the only events that are thus designated in the New Testament. The one was the divine expression of the admission of the first Jews into the new Messianic kingdom, and the other, that of the first Gentiles.*⁶³ This view has also been propagated by H. Leo Boles, and in this century, Dave Miller and Donald Nash.

Problems with this viewpoint

We can summarize the objections to this viewpoint in primarily three ways:

⁵⁸ Torrey, R. A. *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit as Revealed in the Scriptures and in Personal Experience*. New York; Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, 1910.

⁵⁹ Bruner, Frederick Dale. *A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New Testament Witness*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997.

⁶⁰ Grudem, Wayne A. "Preface." *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?: 4 Views*. Edited by Stanley N. Gundry and Wayne A. Grudem. Zondervan Counterpoints Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.

⁶¹ H. Leo Boles writes, "In every instance of a Holy Spirit baptism recorded in the New Testament a miracle was wrought in speaking with 'other tongues' and other extraordinary things." (p. 153). See: Boles, Leo H. *The Holy Spirit: His Personality, Nature, Works*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1975.

⁶² **Cessationist**: all miraculous gifts from the Spirit ceased after the first century AD.

⁶³ McGarvey, J. W. *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles*. Delight, Arkansas: Gospel Light Publishing Company, reprint of 1892 ed.

- Holy Spirit Baptism does not have to be linked to miraculous gifts, especially as a necessary or usual accompaniment.
- The non-conversion view skews the main point of the day of Pentecost, moving it from being primarily a salvation event to the miraculous display of tongues. The Spirit falling on men and causing them to prophesy was not without precedent. Compare Numbers 11:25 with Acts 2.
- There is more than one promise concerning the Holy Spirit being fulfilled at Pentecost. Acts 1:5 connects to Jesus' promises of *living water* in John 4 & 7 and is fulfilled in Acts 2:1-3; 38-39. Acts 1:8 refers to what Jesus said in John 14-16 and is fulfilled by the miraculous gifts in Acts 2:4-40.

As a conversion experience

This viewpoint of Holy Spirit Baptism asserts that it is an event that happens to **every believer** at the moment of conversion from an unsaved to saved state. *There is no connection to miraculous activity.* This viewpoint characterizes many evangelicals today. Generally speaking, this viewpoint can be described as:

- Holy Spirit Baptism happens to every convert at the beginning of the Christian life.
- *Baptism of the Spirit* is identical with the *gift of the Spirit*; it is one of the distinctive blessings of the new covenant. To have been baptized with the Spirit is to say the same thing as saying one has received the Spirit.
- Baptism in the Spirit results in a new union with Christ and His body, where one enjoys new life, a new position, and a new association.

Unfortunately, there are significant differences among evangelicals regarding the relation of Holy Spirit Baptism to water baptism. Today most believe Holy Spirit Baptism is a spiritual action and not connected with water baptism.

However, the Bible teaches that Holy Spirit baptism is a non-miraculous event for all converts in the moment of water baptism. Writing on this, F. D. Bruner says,

“The baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, according to Luke’s account, includes both the forgiveness of sins and the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38b)—together. This single two-fold benefit corresponds exactly to the Old Testament promise of the coordinate forgiveness of sins and gift of the Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:24–27). The baptism is, in the careful formulation, “for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁴

In baptism, sins are not cleansed away by our own effort so that the Spirit may be received after we cleans our heart. Instead, God removes our sins in the water of baptism and grants the gift of the Spirit, Acts 22:16. *The cleansing from sin, like the gift of the Spirit, is God’s work and therefore God’s present.*⁶⁵

So, as we conclude this section, we assert that **Holy Spirit baptism is the non-miraculous gift offered to sinners in baptism for the purpose of regeneration and continued indwelling.**

⁶⁴ Bruner, *Theology*,... p. 167.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 167.

The Promise of John the Baptist

Holy Spirit is a conversion blessing received by every believer. The four instances of it in the Gospels (Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16; John 1.33) and the mention of it by Jesus and Peter (Acts 1.5; 11.16) provide evidence. We'll use the following verse as our main text from the gospels.

John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

— Luke 3.16 (ESV)

Universal Language

Focus on the last sentence of the verse: *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire*. Who is *you*? In the first sentence we are told John answered *them all*. This includes the crowds, including tax collectors and sinners; as well as the Pharisees and Sadducees (reading Matthew and Mark's accounts). John the Baptist said to them that he would baptize them with water. Then, to these same persons, John says that *Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire*. There is no indication that this promise is limited in scope. We may conclude that the baptism of the Spirit is for anyone who will receive it.

The Baptism of Fire

This is mentioned both in Matthew 3.11 and Luke 3.16. Typically, we associate fire with judgment and destruction. But, that is not the only meaning. It makes more sense if the fire is the fire of purification and purging from sin, which is at the heart of the Spirit's saving work in regeneration. Malachi 3.2-3; Zechariah 13.9; Isaiah 6.6-7; and 1 Peter 1.7 all have this imagery. Isaiah 4.4 mentions a *spirit of burning taking away filth*. When the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner, the "baptism of fire" purifies the soul by putting to death the old man of sin (Romans 6.1-6) and makes way for new life in the Spirit.⁶⁶

Lesser to Greater

John the Baptist said Jesus would be far greater than he was and that Jesus' baptism was far greater than his baptizing in water, Luke 3.16a. *He who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie*. In fact, Jesus was infinitely superior over John. *Why does John give Holy Spirit baptism so much prominence, in comparison with his own ministry, if only a few were going to receive it?* What sense would his comparison make when we think of his baptizing thousands in the Jordan before the appearance of Jesus, while Jesus' Holy Spirit Baptism was applied only to around forty individuals (the twelve in Acts 2 and the family of Cornelius in Acts 10)? It seems that the idea of Jesus' continually baptizing converts with the Holy Spirit down through the centuries seems to fit's John's statement far better than the idea that Jesus would only baptize a few.⁶⁷

The Language in John 1.33

⁶⁶ See Cottrell, *What the Bible Says...*, p. 305.

⁶⁷ Gibson, R. L. *Christian: You Were Baptized in Water and Spirit*. Ft. Worth, TX: Star Publications, 1987.

I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'

— John 1.33 (ESV)

John is often called "John the Baptist" because it was the characteristic of his ministry to baptize with water. The same could be true of Jesus, because it is the characteristic of his ministry to baptize with the Spirit. *He who baptizes* is a present participle, and does not just describe the single event of Pentecost, but *the* distinctive ministry of Jesus. *Only the ongoing, universal salvation approach to Holy Spirit baptism does justice to God's speaking of Jesus in this way.*

Six Promises Concerning the Holy Spirit:

The promise regarding the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 did not just refer to the visible signs and wonders worked that day. There were as many as six different promises fulfilled:

- OT prophecies about a new, universal, saving presence of the Holy Spirit, Joel's prophecy being an example, Joel 2.28-32.
- John 1.33, Acts 1.4 - the Father's promise that the Christ would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire.
- John 4.10-14; 7.37-39 - Jesus would give the HS as living water to all who are spiritually dry and thirsty -- a promise that would begin only after His ascension.
- Luke 11.13 - Jesus promised that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him, a promise for all.
- John 14-16 - Jesus' promise, strictly to the apostles, that after His departure, the Spirit would take his place and guide them into all truth via revelation and inspiration.
- Luke 24.49 - Jesus' promise to the apostles. The promise of the Father would come upon them, and they would be clothed with power from on high.

From these six promises come two main areas of emphasis. First there is the matter of salvation, given to all who receive the Spirit. Second, there is the promises specifically to the apostles regarding power that would come upon them in order to equip them to preach and confirm the message.

Of these two areas of emphasis, which is the main thing going on in Acts 2? Over the course of the Restoration Movement, we have typically focused more on the miraculous gifts. This is to make the same mistake the Pentecostals make. The greater, much more significant and climactic point is the salvation brought by the Spirit.

A Look at Acts

In the book of Acts, we have the realization of the promises from the Old Testament, the gospels, and Jesus' words in the days before His ascension. The events of Acts 2 demonstrate the coming of the Spirit in a way not experienced before in all of creation. When reading Acts 2, we need to make a distinction between the two promises Jesus gives the apostles in Acts 1.4-8.

The first promise is found in Acts 1.4-5:

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

— Acts 1.4-5 ESV

The promise of the Father is the promise in John 1.33. The time of Jesus’ ministry of baptizing in the Holy Spirit and fire was about to begin. This prompted the disciples to ask about the restoring of the kingdom of Israel. To this, Jesus said it was not for them to know, 1.7. Then, we read the second promise:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

— Acts 1.8 ESV

The first promise: A gift of salvation to all who will receive

As referenced above, the greatest emphasis on the day of Pentecost was not so much the miraculous signs that appeared, but the fact that the Holy Spirit brought salvation and extended that to all who would receive. This should be seen as the main thrust of the Old Testament prophecies (Ezekiel 36-37; Joel 2.28, etc.). It appears to be the promise of Luke 11.13 as well as the *living water* promises of John 4 and 7. It also seems to be the point of reference for the first sentence in Luke 24.49: *I am sending the promise of my Father upon you.*

Luke 24.49a and Acts 1.5 are referring to the promise of salvation to all who believe.

The second promise: The apostles would be clothed with power from on high

This promise has to do with the equipping of the apostles and the confirmation of their message. In Luke 24.49b Jesus told the apostles to *stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high*. That *power* is mentioned again in Acts 1.8. He does not specify what the power will be, but we understand it would have involved divine inspiration, the ability to work miracles (tongue speaking, healing, etc.). Luke 24.49b and Acts 1.8 are the fulfillment of Jesus’ promises in John 14-16.

How this plays out in Acts 2

Acts 2.1-2:

The Holy Spirit bursts on the scene with noise like a rushing wind filling the entire house. At this moment, he has not come upon any person, he is simply there.

Acts 2.3-36:

The first thing the Spirit does is endow the apostles with power. This is the fulfillment of Luke 24.49b / Acts 1.8.

And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

— Acts 2.3-4 ESV

Everything in Acts 2.3-36 is a reflection of the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus specifically to the apostles in Acts 1.8. They were given the ability to speak in tongues, which got the attention of their audience and confirmed their message (Acts 2.6-7, 12). Peter spoke via inspiration and fulfilled Jesus' promise in John 14-16.

It is important to remember that the signs and wonders of Acts 2.3-36 are not unique in Biblical history. Miracles weren't new as they had been seen being worked by individuals during Old Testament times and were worked by the apostles during Jesus' ministry.. Gifts of miraculous speaking weren't new, Numbers 11.25. Inspiration was not new, as this gift had been given to the Old Testament writers.

There is no reason to equate Luke's statement that they were *all filled with the Holy Spirit* with Holy Spirit Baptism. About this, Robert Milligan, says:

I see no evidence whatever that this supernatural power was itself the baptism in the Spirit, or that it was in any way essential to it. Balaam possessed this power in part, and so did Judas; but neither of them was ever baptized in the Spirit.⁶⁸

These miracles and signs were for the purpose of explaining and confirming the greater work of God, i.e., salvation. *The miracles accompanied Holy Spirit Baptism as proof of Peter's sermon explaining it and offering it as a free gift to everyone.*⁶⁹ These miracles accompanied the apostles throughout their ministry (Acts 2.43; 4.31; 3.6-9; 5.12-16).

Acts 2.37-41:

As Acts 2.37 begins, no one, *not even the apostles*, have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit arrived and is present, Acts 2.1-2, and He has endowed the apostles with supernatural power, fulfilling Acts 1.8. But it is not until Acts 2.37 begins that we see the fulfillment of the promise of Acts 1.5. Peter's sermon has prepared them to receive the offer of baptism in the Spirit as they have been convicted and are now seeking the remission of their sin.

Peter tells them what they must do.

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

— Acts 2.38-39 ESV

The *gift* in 2.38 is the Holy Spirit, who provides us salvation, i.e., regeneration and indwelling.

As we examine Acts 2.39, it is important to see the emphasis in the verse. This is best seen by a reading from Young's Literal Translation:

for to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all those afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call.'

— Acts 2.39 YLT

⁶⁸ Milligan, Robert. *The Great Commission*. Lexington: J.B. Morton and Company, 1873.

⁶⁹ Cottrell, *What the Bible Says*, ... p. 312.

The emphatic in the verse is *to you*. The wording is out of order for emphasis. **You** will receive the Spirit. **You** will receive the promise. This is the promise of Luke 24.49a and Acts 1.5. This is the promise of salvation ... for every person who chooses to receive it. This is conditioned upon:

- Luke 11.13 - our asking for it.
- Acts 22.16 - our calling upon the name of the Lord
- John 7.37-38 - our belief
- Acts 2.38 - our repentance and baptism. In Acts 5.32 Peter preached that God *gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him*.

Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.38) is the same thing as being baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is when the Spirit comes directly into contact with our dead soul for the purpose of regenerating it and raising it from the dead and creating within it new spiritual life. As Cottrell says, *the point is not miracles, it is salvation!*⁷⁰

A long-standing viewpoint we must clear up is that when we read about the promise of the Holy Spirit that it is not always referring to miraculous gifts.

- Ephesians 1.13 - Paul refers to the *promised Holy Spirit*. Similarly, in Galatians 3.14 Paul points to the *promise of the Spirit through faith*. The context for both of these texts is salvation ... not miraculous gifts.
- In Acts 1.5 Jesus speaks of what the Father has promised, namely baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- In Acts 2.33, note what Peter says concerning the actions of Christ, who has now ascended: *having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing*. Again, the main emphasis of Acts 2 is not miraculous signs and wonders ... it is salvation.
- Next, in 2.38, Peter offers the Holy Spirit as a gift to penitent sinners, and then says, *for you is the promise*.

As we make our way through Acts 1.5 to 2.39 - *the promise* is referring to the experience of salvation.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Define the non-conversion view of Holy Spirit Baptism.

⁷⁰ Cottrell, *What the Bible Says*, ... p. 313.

2. What are the three main religious proponents of this viewpoint?
3. What are some of the problems with the non-conversion view?
4. Define the conversion view of Holy Spirit Baptism.
5. When does Holy Spirit Baptism occur? (Acts 2.38)
6. To whom is the promise of Holy Spirit Baptism given?
7. What are the two promises in Acts 1.5, 8?
8. What was the “main event” on Pentecost?
9. What was the secondary event on Pentecost? What was the purpose behind these things?
10. In the New Testament, what seems to be the primary emphasis in regard to the promise of the Holy Spirit?

11. How has this lesson challenged your view on Holy Spirit Baptism?