

# HAVE YE RECEIVED THE SPIRIT?

## A Topical Study of Acts 19.1-7

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On his third missionary journey, in the city of Ephesus, Paul found himself face-to-face with a group of believers who seemed dull and dry, listless and lifeless. I wonder if, at this time, Paul was not reminded of another man who ministered in a very dry and dull arena. The man's name? Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 37, we read how he was caught up in the Spirit of the Lord and taken to a valley. As he looked across the plain, he saw only dead, dry bones. The Lord said to him, "Son of man, can these bones live again?"

"I don't know," Ezekiel answered.

"Speak to the bones," the Lord commanded.

So Ezekiel preached to the bones. And as he did, something incredible happened. With a great noise, the bones began to miraculously link themselves together into skeletons. Yet, although skin appeared on them, they remained lifeless. And Ezekiel realized that commotion is not equivalent to creation.

If you watched the political conventions before the last presidential elections, like Ezekiel, you saw a great deal of commotion—lots of noise and shaking, rhetoric and oration, banners waving and people applauding. What happens at political conventions can also happen in churches. There can be all kinds of noise, shaking, and commotion—but that doesn't mean creation is taking place.

So the Lord said to Ezekiel, "Prophecy to the wind." The Hebrew word for wind is , which also means "breath" or "spirit." The same word in Greek, *pneuma*, means "wind," "breath," or "spirit" as well. As Ezekiel prophesied to the wind, life entered the lifeless bodies, and they became a living army. It was not when Ezekiel preached *at* them, but when he interceded *for* them—when he preached to the wind on behalf *of* them—that they became an effective, vibrant, living army.

"Not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit, saith the Lord," (Zechariah 4:6). And in Acts 19, as Paul talked to the disciples in Ephesus, he realized that even though they were disciplined, even though they were students, there was a dullness in them, a dryness about them that could only be cured by the ruach, the pneuma, the Spirit within them. That is why he was pressed to ask if they had received the Spirit since they believed.

I must ask the same question to myself and to this congregation. I know you're believers, but have you received the Holy Ghost since the time you opened your heart to Jesus Christ?

"Wait a minute," you protest. "I thought when I opened my heart to Him, I automatically became a recipient of His Spirit."

You did. Paul declared that any man who does not have the Spirit is none of His (Romans 8:9). In other words, if you don't have the Holy Spirit, you're not a Christian. When you opened your heart to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit took up residence with you. You have the Holy Spirit. But the question for you, your children, and the people you care about is this: Does the Holy Spirit have you? That's the issue. You see, there are different relationships you can have with the Spirit.

In John 14, addressing His disciples, Jesus said, "The Spirit is *with* you, but He shall be *in* you" (see John 14:17). When did the Holy Ghost come in them? In John 20, when, following His Resurrection, Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Then He said, "Now that the Holy Spirit is in you, go to Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Ghost to come *upon* you, for that is when you shall receive power" (see Acts 1:8). The word Luke used for "power" was *dunamis* from which we get our word "dynamite." The disciples went to Jerusalem and waited for ten days until the Day of Pentecost. When a mighty wind blew through the Upper Room, the Spirit came upon them and they emerged as mighty dynamos.

The question still must be asked today: Have you received the Spirit since you believed? I know the Spirit is in you, but have you allowed the Spirit to come upon you, to empower you? Or are you still in the Upper Room, hiding out, cloistered away, with a lack of boldness, a lack of living water flowing from you, and lots of dryness within you? Have you, or the ones you care about, received the Holy Ghost since you believed? That's what Paul asked the men here in Acts 19.

"What Holy Ghost?" they said. "We never heard about this."

"You've never heard about the Holy Spirit?" Paul asked. "Then how were you baptized?" You see, to Paul, baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit were intimately and intricately linked. In Acts 2:38, we read that Peter emerged from the Upper Room and declared to the crowd gathered outside, "Repent and be baptized. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Peter linked water baptism with baptism in the Spirit. In Matthew 3, we read it was when Jesus was baptized in water that the heavens opened and the Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove.

I find it extremely significant that throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is typified by a dove. The Spirit came in the form of a dove—not a hawk.

When my son Peter-John was about two years old, we were driving into town, and I said, "Peter, do you know what Daddy does every day?"

He said, "Yeah. You're a creature."

"No, Peter," I answered, "I'm not a creature."

"Oh. You're a screecher."

"No, Peter, I'm a preacher."

Due to the misconception that those who really have the anointing of the Spirit will shout and screech, a lot of preachers are screechers. But the Spirit came not in the form of a screeching, shrieking hawk. Nor did He come in the form of a duck. He's not a "quack." Maybe you've followed the sad story of Ivan Popov, the evangelist who, claiming to have the power of the Holy Ghost, called people out of the crowd and "miraculously" told them where they were from. As it turned out, Popov was getting his information through the wireless microphones of his assistants planted in the audience.

Neither is the Holy Spirit pictured as a peacock, for He is not proud. In John 16, Jesus said the Spirit does not speak of Himself. Therefore, any church or person who is truly Spirit-filled will be one who draws attention not to the Holy Ghost—but to Jesus Christ.

Nor is the Holy Spirit symbolized by an ostrich—with His head in the sand, oblivious to the sin in our lives. The Spirit does indeed convict, for part of His ministry is to keep us from sin. Listen for His voice within you as He speaks to you, saying, "Be careful. This is the way, walk ye in it," (see Isaiah 30:21).

The Holy Spirit is not likened to a vulture, for He doesn't swoop down to pick on you, to pick at you, or to pick from you. There have been people with a "vulture mentality" who have said to me, "The Holy Spirit is moving me to prophesy doom and gloom against you, or against Applegate Christian Fellowship." But because the Spirit is not like a vulture, I know it is not Him speaking.

The Spirit is like a dove—gentle and pure, acceptable and pleasing, beautiful and loyal. One of the few species of animals that mate for life, if a dove loses its mate, it will spend the rest of its days mourning. So, too, the Holy Spirit is loyal and unwavering in His desire to come upon you and to empower you in order that you might walk in a way that is sweet in the sight of the Father and successful in ministry.

Simultaneous with the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove. I suggest to you that's the ideal. There should not be confusion about

baptism in the Spirit. We should tell people, “Even as you come to the waters for baptism, expect by faith to receive the coming upon of the Holy Spirit at that time.”

There has been unneeded division between pentecostal and dispensational theology over the issue of the baptism of the Spirit. By and large, pentecostal theology declares the baptism of the Spirit is subsequent to water baptism. On the other hand, dispensational theology generally teaches the baptism of the Spirit is inherent in water baptism. I believe that the baptism of the Spirit, ideally, is simultaneous with water baptism.

As seen in Jesus’ baptism, when a believer comes out of the waters of baptism, that is the ideal time to expect the baptism of the Spirit as well. Now, it doesn’t always happen that way because many people aren’t aware of the possibility of being baptized in the Spirit at the time of water baptism. Consequently, it can be months, years, or even decades before they understand that the lifelessness and listlessness, the dullness and dryness of their spiritual lives is the result of an absence of the “coming upon” ministry of the Spirit.

If, like the Ephesian disciples, you have been baptized, but would have a hard time answering Paul’s question as to whether you had received the Spirit, the way to do so is so simple. You see, the baptism of the Spirit is truly within your reach even now.

I am reminded of another baptism—that of a man named Noah. According to Peter, the drowning of the polluted and corrupted world of Noah’s day was an illustration of what happens when we symbolically say goodbye to the corruption and pollution of our sin nature in the waters of baptism (1 Peter 3:20, 21). Following his “baptism” in the Flood, Noah released a dove, which circled the skies as it searched for a place upon which to set the sole of its foot. So, too, I believe the Spirit of the Lord is circling our world and our lives, saying, “Is there room for Me to come upon you?”

This is the point where many believers miss out. “I’m open,” they say. “If the Lord wants to empower me, baptize me, or come upon me in a fresh way through His Spirit, He knows where to find me.” Noah could have stood on the deck of the ark saying the same thing. “If the dove wants to land on me, he sees where I am.” But that’s not what Noah did. We read that Noah “put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark” (Genesis 8:9).

Ezekiel 22 teaches the same lesson. “I looked for a man to stand in the gap, but I couldn’t find one,” said the Lord (see 22:30). Saints, the economy of God is such that He partners with us. He doesn’t work apart from us. He waits for an intercessor. If there’s trouble in your family, if there’s sin in our country, the problem is not with

God—it's with us. Where are we? Why aren't we partnering with God? He's waiting to bless. He desires to move. He wants to touch your kids. He wants to save your parents. He wants to work in the situation you see as so tragic. But He's waiting for you to partner with Him. Does He need to? No. But He's chosen to.

It has been wisely said that without God, I can't. But without me, He won't. He's waiting to partner with us. Why? Because He's preparing us for the next billion, zillion, quadrillion years, when we will partner with Him for eternity. Therefore, you can either say, "I'm open," and wait for something to happen for the next forty years, or, like Noah, you can say, "I see the dove circling above. Oh, Lord, I need Your empowering. With the hand of faith, I now receive the dynamic of Your Spirit upon my life."

Precious people, the Spirit is even now within reach. Grasp Him by faith. Draw Him to you. And if you do, your walk will never be the same.