
The Baptism in the Holy Spirit: The Initial Experience and Continuing Evidences of the Spirit-Filled Life

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On the Day of Pentecost visitors to Jerusalem witnessed the unbelievable sight of Spirit-filled believers declaring the glory of God in languages they had never learned. Their response to the supernatural was natural: “What does this mean?”¹ (Acts 2:12).

Twenty centuries later the same question is being asked as the Holy Spirit is doing spectacular things all around the world, not just in one location. Tongues-speaking Pentecostals have become the second largest family of Christians in the world, surpassed only by the Roman Catholic Church. One Pentecostal scholar has gathered convincing statistics on the explosion of church growth around the world in the Pentecostal and charismatic groups that teach the necessity of speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit.²

Biblical and Historical Background

The emphasis Pentecostals place on the person and work of the Holy Spirit is not a recent discovery. The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was the logical culmination of revealed truth about the Holy Spirit as found throughout Old Testament Scriptures.

The usual reference in the Old Testament to the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of God” or “his Spirit.” At creation, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Artisans at the building of the tabernacle were “filled with the Spirit of God” (Exodus 31 and 35). Prophets and national leaders ministered supernaturally when prompted by the Spirit of God (Numbers 24:2; 1 Samuel 10:10; 11:6; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 24:20; Isaiah 48:16; Ezekiel 11:24; Zechariah 7:12).

Prophecy, or speaking in behalf of God, is evident throughout the Old Testament. Sometimes the message came almost silently in thoughts, dreams, or visions. At other times it came with significant emotion (cf. Numbers 11:24-29). In each case, however, prophetic speech is the unique sign of the Spirit's coming to anoint particular persons for divinely given ministries.³

In Acts 2:17 Peter decisively connects the Pentecost event with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:28,29). In fact, lest we miss the point, Peter repeats Joel's prophecy in a way not found in the Hebrew text, saying a second time, “I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy” (v.18). The viewpoint of both the Old and New Testaments is that the coming of the Spirit is indicated by prophetic speech. The initial prophetic speech in Acts is speaking in tongues.

The Israelites were unaccustomed to such a universal move of the Spirit in the lives of sons and daughters, old and young, men and women. Only a select few charismatic prophets, kings, and judges were moved by the Holy Spirit to minister supernaturally and experience the presence of the Spirit, as David demonstrates in the Psalms. Peter put the Day of Pentecost visitation into perspective as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and a divinely ordered gift of the Spirit for all believers, not just for leadership offices.

Biblical theology is a unity based on the entire Bible. It is both progressive and unified as God reveals cumulative truth from Genesis to Revelation. The Old Testament prophesied a coming age of the Spirit. The theme is enlarged in the Spirit-empowered ministry of Jesus. At Pentecost the Spirit comes in power to all God's people. Yet individual writers emphasize special aspects of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The writings of Paul tend to emphasize the Spirit-filled life subsequent to the baptism in the Holy

Spirit. Luke's writings place more emphasis on the coming of the Spirit to empower life and ministry through the Spirit-filled life." There is no contradiction between Paul's writings and Luke's writings. They are complementary.

Baptism in the Spirit as the Distinctive Message of Pentecostals

The very essence of Pentecostalism is the recognition that the experience of conversion, while supremely precious, does not exhaust God's supply of what is available to the believer. Scripture makes it clear that all believers have the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9,16). However, the constant hunger for "more of God" is the heartbeat of Pentecostalism. This is particularly true when, within Scripture, we recognize another life-changing experience available to every believer.

The baptism in the Spirit is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The scriptural ideal for the believer is to be continually filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).⁴ Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the specific event that introduces the believer to the ongoing process of living a Spirit-empowered life. Although speaking in tongues has value as an outward sign of Spirit baptism, it is designed by God to be much more than evidence of a past experience. Subsequent speaking in tongues brings enrichment to the individual believer when employed in private prayer (1 Corinthians 14:4) and to the congregation when accompanied by the interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:6,25).

From its founding, The General Council of the Assemblies of God has recognized the baptism in the Holy Spirit as an experience distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth. It has also recognized that the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Spirit is speaking in tongues.⁵ The church's Statement of Fundamental Truths contains the following statements:

Fundamental Truth 7: *All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian church. With it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31). This experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth (Acts 8:12-17; 10:44-46; 11:14-16; 15:7-9). With the baptism in the Holy Ghost come such experiences as an overflowing fullness of the Spirit (John 7:37-39; Acts 4:8), a deepened reverence for God (Acts 2:43; Hebrews 12:28), and intensified consecration to God and dedication to His work (Acts 2:42), and a more active love for Christ, for His Word, and for the lost (Mark 16:20).*

Fundamental Truth 8: *The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance (Acts 2:4). The speaking in tongues in this instance is the same in essence as the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:4-10,28), but different in purpose and use.*

The Assemblies of God has consistently taught the importance of the Baptism and the Spirit-filled life for both the individual believer and the entire Church.

While the exact phrase "baptism in the Holy Spirit" never occurs in Scripture,⁶ it is closely related to the biblical expression "baptize(d) in [or with] the Holy Spirit" (cf. Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:16). John the Baptist, the first to use the expression shortly before Jesus began His public ministry, said, "He [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; cf. also John 1:33). At the conclusion of His earthly ministry, Jesus referred to John's statement (Acts 1:5); and Peter, in reporting on the events in the home of Cornelius, also repeated the statement (Acts 11:16).

Several other terms express essentially the same idea as the expression "baptized in the Holy Spirit." Acts 1:8 promises the reception of power when "the Holy Spirit comes on you" (cf. also 19:6). Acts 2:4 states, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit," on the Day of Pentecost (see also Acts 9:17). In Acts 2:17 Peter describes this filling with the Holy Spirit as a fulfillment of the prophet Joel's prophecy that God will "pour out [his] Spirit on all people" (cf. also 10:45). According to Acts 8:16, prior to the ministry of Peter and John in Samaria, the Holy Spirit "had not yet come" on any of the Samaritans (cf. also 10:44; 11:15). After the laying on of the apostles' hands, the Samaritans "received the Holy Spirit" (cf. also 10:47).

The word baptism refers literally to a "dipping" or "immersing" in water. When one speaks of baptism in the Holy Spirit, the term functions as a metaphor or comparison with water baptism. Christian

water baptism is an initiatory rite, acknowledging conversion and the indwelling presence of the Spirit.⁷ The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a subsequent powerful, overwhelming immersion in the Holy Spirit. While New Testament believers sometimes received later infillings of the Spirit (Acts 4:31), “baptism” in the Holy Spirit in all the biblical examples happens only once to an individual.

A Gift with Rich Benefits

Modern evangelical Christians place great stress on being “born again” (John 3:3,5-8; 1 Peter 1:3) which is rightly understood to be the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration (John 3:6; Titus 3:5). As He comes in regenerating power, the Spirit makes His presence known as an inner witness to the believer’s new status as a child of God. The new believer can now pray, “*Abba, Father,*” expressing the intimate and confident relationship of children to their Heavenly Father (Romans 8:15,16). Having taken up residence within, the Spirit also guides and enables the new believer in a transforming life of progressive sanctification or spiritual maturity (Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 5:16,22-24).

The work of the Spirit, however, is not just an inner transformation in new birth and sanctification; it is also a work of empowering believers as witnesses for Christ, thus fulfilling the mission of the Church (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).⁸ Peter presented the initial descent of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as a mighty inauguration of the last days in which all of God’s people will be baptized, or filled, with the Spirit (Joel 2:28,29; Acts 2:17,18). The final words of his sermon are, “Repent, and be baptized. . . And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38,39). Far from being a one-time event on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit is noted to have baptized, or filled, believer after believer. Both the Book of Acts and the Pauline epistles show repeated and continuing empowerment by the Holy Spirit and the impartation of powerful gifts for ministry (Acts 8:17; 9:17; 10:44-46; 19:4-7; Romans 1:11; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 5:18-21; 1 Thessalonians 5:19,20; Hebrews 2:4). Any understanding of the Spirit’s work that is limited to regeneration is not representative of the biblical record.

Fidelity to Scripture, therefore, indicates that men and women ought to seek not only the transformational work of the Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, but also the empowering work of the Spirit in the Baptism promised by Jesus and repeatedly witnessed in the Book of Acts and the Epistles. Lives are to be changed by the Spirit in regeneration and then set ablaze and gifted by the same Spirit for a lifetime of service. Seeking the baptism in the Spirit is strategic for effective Christian living and ministry.

An Experience Subsequent to Regeneration

The baptism in the Spirit is subsequent to and distinct from the new birth. Scripture clearly describes a conversion experience in which the Holy Spirit baptizes believers into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Scripture just as clearly describes an experience in which Christ baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). These cannot refer to the same experience since the agent who does the baptizing and the element into which the candidate is baptized are different in each case.⁹

Luke, author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, generally presents the baptism or infilling of the Spirit as something which occurs to disciples or believers, his characteristic terms for those who have already been converted or saved. For Luke, baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience distinct from and logically subsequent to personal salvation. Moreover, Luke presents baptism in the Spirit and its accompanying power as the normal expectation of believers in the first decades of the Church’s history.

Subsequent usually means a time separation, but not always. The Gentiles who had gathered at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10) seemingly experienced both regeneration and baptism in the Holy Spirit at the same time. While a theological description of what happened would require regeneration as a prerequisite for baptism in the Spirit, everything happened so quickly that two separate works of God were experienced as one event. In this case, Spirit baptism was logically subsequent to regeneration, although it may not have been subsequent in time to any perceptible degree.¹⁰

Every believer has the privilege of being baptized in the Spirit and should then expect to speak in tongues. The obvious starting point for such a declaration is the account of the initial outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). On that day all the believers were gathered together in one place (Acts 2:1); their number was apparently about 120 (Acts 1:15). For roughly 10 days they had been waiting

for “the promise of the Father,” as Jesus had charged them to do prior to His ascension (Acts 1:4). Then according to Acts 2:4, “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”¹¹ As Peter explained to the crowd witnessing the marvelous event, this outpouring of the Spirit fulfilled the ancient prophecy of Joel for the last days (Acts 2:17). No longer would God’s Spirit be restricted to a few prophets, but in the new age initiated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the work of the Spirit would now be available to all (cf. also Acts 2:39).

Acts 8:4-13 describes Philip’s effective ministry in Samaria. Verse 12 summarizes, “But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Acts 8:14-24 then reports about additional ministry among the Samaritans by the apostles Peter and John. In particular, verses 15-17 say,

When they [Peter and John] arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17).

The dramatic account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus is recounted in Acts 9. Saul is knocked down and blinded by the light of Christ’s presence. After being led on to Damascus still without sight, Saul is visited by a believer named Ananias, who says to him, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Ananias regards Saul’s conversion as having already occurred, apparently at the time of his encounter with the risen Christ. Nevertheless, Saul still needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit and Ananias prayed for him to that end. Clearly Saul (also called Paul) was filled with the Spirit some 3 days after his conversion.

Years later Paul came to the great city of Ephesus on his third missionary journey. According to Acts 19:7 there were about 12 believers, described as “disciples” in Acts 19:1. The dialogue recorded between Paul and the Ephesus disciples is instructive:

And [Paul] asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when¹² you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus” (Acts 19:2-4).

Clearly, at the time of this conversation these believers had not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit for they had not heard of the experience. The context presumes that something was lacking. They also had not been instructed about Christian water baptism; although, once Paul explained it to them, they were quickly baptized (19:5). Following their water baptism, “When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (19:6). The narrative could not be clearer in its emphasis that the fullness of the Spirit was received following both the Christian belief of the Ephesian “disciples” and their Christian water baptism (19:5).

In the Acts 2, Acts 9, and Acts 19 accounts, the reception of the Spirit occurs following conversion. According to Luke’s inspired record, baptism in the Spirit is not an aspect of conversion, but rather a separate and distinct experience. It is also logically subsequent to conversion, although as the experience of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius makes clear, conversion and baptism in the Spirit can occur in such swift succession that they seem to take place simultaneously.

Tongues as Initial Physical Evidence

The Holy Spirit can inspire people to speak in languages which they have not learned, as was demonstrated conclusively on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2) when people from all over the world heard Galileans speaking foreign languages which they could not have known. In the modern era similar episodes have occurred many times.¹³

The expression “initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit” refers to the first outward, observable sign that the Holy Spirit has come in filling power. The repeated testimony of Scripture is that this physical sign occurred at the time the Spirit was poured out on individuals. When the 120 disciples were filled with the Spirit, they spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4). They spoke then, not a day, week, or year later. When Cornelius’ household was baptized in the Spirit, members spoke in tongues, and the believing Jews were amazed (Acts 10:44-48). Again, they spoke in tongues at the same time they were

baptized, not at some later time. When the Ephesian believers were baptized in the Spirit, they spoke in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1-6). There is no statement or implication of a delay between the event of the baptism in the Spirit and the evidence of speaking in tongues. Those who teach that there can be a delay in speaking in tongues draw their conclusions from personal experience or the testimony of others, not from a clear statement of Scripture. Since Scripture nowhere teaches, implies, or gives an example of a delay occurring between the baptism in the Spirit and the evidence of speaking in tongues, then we must adhere to the testimony of Scripture.

Prior to the Day of Pentecost, many within Israel had concluded that after God spoke to and through the last of the Old Testament prophets, He was speaking directly to Israel no more. Only after Messiah was to arrive, along with the anticipated Age to Come, would God again speak to His people through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Suddenly, in this spiritually lifeless context, the Spirit begins to be poured out, not just on selected individuals as in the Old Testament, but upon masses of people, essentially everyone in the fledgling Church. It was as if the cry of Moses' heart had been fulfilled: "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29). In some marvelous sense the Age to Come had begun, and a church filled with people who spoke in tongues was a sign signifying the dawn of a new period in God's eternal plan for humankind.

That Luke understands speaking in tongues to demonstrate the infilling presence of the Holy Spirit is clearly indicated by an examination of Acts 10:44-48.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God (Acts 10:44-46).

The conclusion is clear: If someone, even someone unexpected, hears the Word and speaks in divinely inspired tongues, that person has received the Holy Spirit. This was the reasoning of Peter and the other Jewish Christians present. Speaking in tongues is clear evidence that someone has received the gift of the Holy Spirit (or been baptized in the Holy Spirit). The evidence was so clear for Peter that he insisted Cornelius and his Gentile friends be baptized in water (10:48).

Later, as Peter discussed the Cornelius incident with the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem, he again referred to the phenomenon he had witnessed, "So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17). The next verse confirms that the apostles and brethren accepted tongues as convincing evidence of the baptism in the Spirit: "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God" (11:18).

While Acts 10:45,46 establishes that speaking in tongues is clear evidence of Spirit baptism, evidence supporting this doctrine is also provided by the overall pattern of Acts associating speaking in tongues with baptism in the Spirit. Acts describes five occasions on which people received an empowering of the Spirit for the first time (i.e., baptism in the Spirit). In none of these accounts are all of the details given, but four of these occasions include significant detail. For Paul's reception of the Spirit recorded in Acts 9:17,19, hardly any detail is recorded. As previously noted, supernatural phenomena are a sign of the coming of the Spirit. The New Testament simply picks up on a very important Old Testament motif.

In Acts 2, 10, and 19 various phenomena are indicated, such as the sound of wind, tongues as of fire, prophecy, and speaking in tongues.¹⁴ The only phenomenon occurring in each case, however, is speaking in tongues.

In the Acts 8 account of Peter and John's ministry among the Samaritans, speaking in tongues is not specifically mentioned but it is strongly implied. After the apostles had laid their hands on the Samaritans, some visible and extraordinary manifestation accompanied the reception of the Spirit. This is evident for, after seeing something remarkable, the magician Simon wanted to buy the ability to confer the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:18 notes explicitly, "When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money." Based on the pattern found in Acts 2, 10, and 19 it seems most likely that what Simon saw was the Samaritan believers speaking in tongues. Had the experience been only by faith without any accompanying sign, Simon would not have known whether the Samaritan believers actually received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:17-19 suggests that Saul of Tarsus (i.e., the apostle Paul) was filled with the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Ananias. Though no details of this filling are given, we know from 1 Corinthians 14:18 that Paul prayed in tongues regularly and often. It would hardly be surprising if that pattern was begun at the time he was filled with the Spirit.

Despite the sketchiness of the report about Paul's baptism in the Spirit, and despite the fact that tongues are not explicitly mentioned in Act 8, the evidence of chapters 2, 10, and 19 demonstrates an overall pattern of speaking in tongues as regularly accompanying the baptism in the Holy Spirit. When these three witnesses are linked with (1) Luke's underlying awareness of the Spirit's presence in divinely inspired speech and (2) the strong inference of Acts 10:45,46 connecting speaking in tongues with the gift of the Spirit, the Pentecostal doctrine that speaking in tongues constitutes evidence of Spirit baptism is clearly established.¹⁵

The Baptism—Entry Into the Spirit-Filled Life

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is just the open door leading into a Spirit-filled life—a fact that can be easily overlooked, even by Pentecostals. Though we believe that speaking in tongues is the unmistakable initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, we do not believe it signifies instant maturity. *There are many other evidences that a life continues to be filled with the Spirit and is growing and maturing spiritually.*

Having spoken in tongues at the baptism in the Spirit, the Spirit-filled believer must continue to respond to the supernatural promptings of the Holy Spirit. Praying in the Spirit (intercessory and worship expressions in tongues) should be a continuing part of the new Spirit-filled life. Though not all Spirit-filled believers are given the gift of tongues which through interpretation edifies the church congregation (1 Corinthians 12:30), they all have the privilege of praying in the Spirit, especially at times when the human intellect does not know how to pray. Likewise, every Spirit-filled believer can and should expect to be used in supernatural ways in some, though not all, of the gifts of the Spirit.

We cannot agree with some who teach that the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23) alone are sufficient evidence that a believer has been baptized in the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ But we do affirm that such character qualities (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith and faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) should be seen in the lives of those who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. After baptism in the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit should develop alongside a growing ministry empowered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We urge all believers to grow in these character qualities as persistently as they seek the gifts of the Spirit.¹⁷

A Promise for All Believers

We are fully aware that within the Christian community there are various interpretations of the biblical description and universal availability of the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues. This paper has attempted to deal with the biblical texts relating to the subject in as open and careful a manner as possible. Though some critics have accused Pentecostals of making theology subservient to individual experience, we feel that the studied conclusions presented above are both taught in Scripture and confirmed by experience, not unjustifiably based on experience alone. Could it be that those who seek to refute the baptism in the Spirit on the ground that it is based on experience rather than on Scripture may indeed be arguing from their own experience of not having received the Baptism with the initial biblical evidence? We appeal to all believers to study the biblical passages prayerfully, and with open mind and heart seek the fullness of the Spirit for today's challenges, just as that same Spirit moved upon a unified body of believers in the Early Church.

The overwhelmingly godless condition of society today, with evil becoming increasingly rampant, calls for a Spirit-filled church that can meet the challenges of Satan with a supernatural demonstration of Holy Spirit power. If there is fear of an experience that seems beyond one's rational control, let the personal love of a benevolent Heavenly Father give assurance to both heart and mind. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-13).

We appeal to our non-Pentecostal fellow believers who may in complete sincerity disagree with Pentecostal theology and practice. Rather than engaging in attacks on fellow believers who likewise base their spiritual experience on Scripture, please follow the example of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39). “For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (5:38,39). We believe this last-days outpouring of the Holy Spirit is God’s sovereign move to meet the satanic challenges of the day and to prepare Christ’s bride for His soon return. Around the world, God is moving by His Spirit in powerful and dynamic ways.

You are not more loved by God because you have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but you will be better equipped to witness with boldness to God’s abundant grace. Empowered service and holy living accompany the Spirit-filled life after the Baptism initiation. In believing, expecting faith, ask Jesus to baptize you in the Holy Spirit.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Questions are often raised about the doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit. The following are a few of the more frequently asked questions.

1. Is the Book of Acts intended to be history or theology, and can doctrine be based on less than declarative statements?

The Bible itself responds to this question. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine” (2 Timothy 3:16). Again Paul wrote, “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning” (Romans 15:4). After recounting Old Testament events that happened to the Israelites, Paul says, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:6).

While doctrine should not be based on isolated fragments of Scripture, it can be based on substantial, implied truth. The doctrine of the Trinity is based not on declarative statement, but on a comparison of Scripture passages relating to the Godhead. Like the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of tongues as evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is based on substantial portions of Scripture relating to this subject. It is evident that Peter and the church leaders in Jerusalem established doctrine based on repeated experiences of the Spirit understood to be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. They recognized tongues as evidence of people being filled with the Spirit (Acts 10,11). The weight of the biblical text, both in quantity and frequency, provides a solid base for doctrinal formulation.

Luke’s writings (Luke and Acts) clearly present more than just history. While Luke describes his Gospel as a “narrative” (Greek *diegesis*—Luke 1:1) written to be “accurate” and “orderly” (1:3), the way he selects items to include and his editorial and narrative comments reveal an author with an agenda to advance the cause of Christ. Luke is clearly a Christian. In fact, today there is an overwhelming consensus among New Testament scholars that Luke is a theologian, not just a historian. For those interested in learning more about Luke and Acts as inspired historical narratives that also teach theology, we recommend Roger Stronstad’s *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Hendrickson, 1984).

2. Isn’t baptism in the Holy Spirit connected with water baptism in some special way? Since water baptism is a witness to one’s faith in Christ and the reception of God’s saving grace, isn’t Spirit baptism also associated with salvation?

The answer to both questions is no. The theology of the Spirit presented in Acts emphasizes the empowering of believers by the Spirit for effective witness and the utterance of inspired speech. Only by wrongly imposing Paul’s theology of the Spirit (never intended to stand apart from the remainder of biblical revelation) upon Luke’s Gospel and Acts, can baptism in the Holy Spirit be associated with personal conversion, spiritual renewal, or ethical transformation. In short, baptism in the Holy Spirit is a gift given to those who are already Christians. It does not make people Christians.

3. Isn’t speaking in tongues a phenomenon that belonged only to the apostolic period? Did not Paul say that tongues “shall cease” (1 Corinthians 13:8)?

First Corinthians 13:10 says, “When that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away” (NKJV). This does not imply, however, that speaking in tongues would be in effect only

during the apostolic period or until the New Testament canon had been completed, as some have suggested. In fact, while Paul knew he wrote with the authority of the Lord, for him the term “Scripture” referred to the Old Testament canon; Paul had no idea that a New Testament canon would eventually be recognized. Clearly the arrival of “the perfect” is connected in some way with the second coming of Christ and the perfect establishment of God’s kingdom in which God’s will shall “be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Paul also indicated that at the time when tongues shall cease, knowledge shall also vanish away and prophecies shall fail (1 Corinthians 13:8). If knowledge and prophecy are necessary and available to the Church today, then speaking in tongues is as well.

4. When Paul wrote, “Not all speak with tongues, do they?” (1 Corinthians. 12:30), does this not contradict the teaching that all should expect to speak in tongues as evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit?

To understand 1 Corinthians 12:30 one must recognize the various functions of speaking with tongues. Speaking with tongues serves as the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:46). Speaking or praying with tongues in private is for personal edification (1 Corinthians 14:4). And speaking with tongues in the congregation, accompanied by interpretation of tongues, is for the edification of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 14:5).

There is no contradiction between Paul’s desire that all speak with tongues (1 Corinthians 14:5) and the implication of Paul’s rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 12:30, since different contexts are in view. These contrasting contexts are highlighted in 1 Corinthians 14:18,19: “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church ...” Here private tongues are contrasted with public (in church) tongues in a worship service.

Paul recognizes that the Corinthian believers prayed quite frequently in tongues, so frequently in fact that congregational meetings had been disrupted because the distinction between tongues appropriate in public and tongues appropriate only in private prayer had not been observed. To address the potential for disruption, Paul suggests limits on the public exercise of tongues while encouraging private prayer in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:18,19,27,28). Thus private prayer in tongues is encouraged for “all” (1 Corinthians 14:5), with Paul’s own practice as a model (1 Corinthians 14:18), but “not all” pray publicly in tongues in church meetings (1 Corinthians 12:30; 14:27,28). Only those to whom the gift of tongues has been apportioned by the Spirit are to speak in tongues publicly (1 Corinthians 12:10,11) and such tongues must always be interpreted (1 Corinthians 14:27). Private tongues, on the other hand, do not require interpretation for even without interpretation the one who prays in tongues privately is edified (1 Corinthians 14:4).

When examined in context, any apparent contradiction between Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:30 and the Pentecostal expectation that all Spirit-baptized believers will speak in tongues quickly evaporates. Instead of contradiction, we find complementary truth.

5. If speaking with tongues either as evidence or gift is scriptural, why were there periods in church history when the phenomenon seemed to be absent?

The possibility exists that any biblical doctrine can suffer from neglect. In fact, great spiritual renewals have often been accompanied by the revival of doctrine. For example, the doctrine of justification by faith was almost completely lost until the time of the Reformation when Martin Luther and others reemphasized this biblical truth. The doctrine of sanctification had suffered neglect until the time of the Wesleyan Revival when it was again brought to the attention of the Church. While the truth of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking with tongues has appeared in revivals throughout Church history, it did not have the emphasis it has received in the present revival.

Just as there were those who opposed the revival of the doctrines of justification by faith and sanctification, there are those who oppose the revival of the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues. The fact that some refuse to accept a doctrine, however, does not make it unscriptural. Some even rejected the teaching of Jesus during His earthly ministry. The instruction for believers is to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The basis of the testing is not human opinion but the Word of God (Acts 17:11).

6. Is there a danger in teaching the doctrine of tongues as evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit that people will seek for tongues rather than the actual baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Unfortunately this is a possibility, but the abuse of a doctrine does not invalidate the doctrine. Abuses and counterfeits, rather than disproving a doctrine, help to establish the importance of the genuine. While speaking in tongues accompanies the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is important to remember Jesus' command to the disciples was to wait until they were filled with the Spirit. The emphasis must always be on seeking to be filled with the Spirit. Tongues will naturally accompany the experience.

7. If people speak in tongues, will there not be a temptation to spiritual pride?

When people truly understand the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it will result in humility instead of pride. Believers are baptized in the Spirit not because of personal worthiness, but to empower them for service and a more meaningful life. The baptism in the Spirit is received by faith and not because of meritorious works. It cannot be earned or bought. Like all gifts of God it is by grace through faith. Baptism in the Spirit does not guarantee spiritual maturity. Paul's need to rebuke the Christians at Corinth provides clear evidence of that. The cultivation of fruit of the Spirit and a sanctified life are the real indicators of spiritual maturity.

8. What about truly born-again people who have accomplished great things for the Lord but do not speak in tongues?

Without question, some believers who do not speak in tongues have accomplished great things for God. However, every student of Scripture must determine whether to base doctrine on God's Word or on experiences of even the most devout believers. Because the Bible indicates that all may speak with tongues in private prayer if not in the congregation, every believer must determine whether he/she will accept or reject this provision of God's grace.

Scripture makes clear that believers must recognize their personal accountability to God and not evaluate Christian experience on the basis of human comparison. Paul wrote: "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Doctrine must always be based on the Word of God, not on personal experience.

9. What is the relationship between the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the spiritual experiences of regeneration and sanctification?

Spiritual life is composed of specific experiences or events, ongoing processes, and occasional unique experiences. Conversion is a specific experience or event. At a certain moment a person believes in Christ, is forgiven of sin, and is converted or justified. However, after that, there is a lifelong process of sanctification, of conforming to the image of Christ. In the same way, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a specific event. After it, however, there is a lifelong development of Spirit-filled life and ministry. The person matures in the Spirit-filled life, is more responsive to the leading of the Spirit, and is more fruitful in the ministry of the Spirit. In the same way that salvation is an initiation experience leading to Christlikeness, the baptism in the Holy Spirit marks a supernatural endowment leading to Christlike ministry in the power of the Spirit. For example, children or teenagers may be baptized in the Holy Spirit at a young age. Their baptism is real and valid, but as they mature they will grow in their ability to be used by the Spirit in various supernatural ministries. What they receive at the moment of their baptism is not all they will ever receive, nor is it the fullness of the expression of the power of the Spirit that will flow through their lives.

10. What is the relationship of the baptism in the Holy Spirit to other spiritual experiences such as weeping, falling, shaking, etc.?

Periods of renewal and revival have historically included physical manifestations not described in Scripture.¹⁸ The writings of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley contain many such references.

As spiritual life develops, people may experience a variety of spiritual responses. For example, during periods of revival, including both personal and corporate revival, it is not unusual for people to be overcome by compulsive weeping. They may fall or shake or quake when influenced by the power of the Spirit, or they may run, jump, and shout. In short, when people feel the power of God they may respond in a number of ways. These are, or can be, very legitimate and fruitful encounters with the power of God. However, it is a mistake to confuse these spiritual activities with the experience of salvation or the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

11. What is the "anointing" and how does it relate to the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Old Testament kings and priests were anointed with oil to symbolize the power of God in their lives to fulfill their calling. Jesus used this imagery when He said that the Spirit of the Lord was on Him, for He was anointed to minister in a number of ways (Luke 4:18). Therefore, anointing is a declaration that the power of God rests on a person's life enabling one to fulfill the ministry God has given.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit fits this imagery perfectly. This is the thrust of Peter's words at the household of Cornelius when, in explaining the baptism in the Holy Spirit, he indicates that Jesus was anointed with the Spirit and went about doing good and performing miracles (Acts 10:38).

Some, however, when they experience the presence of God in a significant way, or, when they respond to the power of God in an unusual way (falling, etc.) report that they have received an anointing. Further, some teach, or at least imply that certain individuals possess a unique "anointing" and are able to minister it (pass it along) to others when they pray for them. We believe that this is an unwarranted confusion of (1) the anointing that comes from God in the form of the baptism in the Holy Spirit with (2) other legitimate spiritual experiences a person may have when sensing the power and presence of God. If people come to believe that the unusual spiritual experiences they have (falling, etc.) are the anointing, then the biblical doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit could easily be replaced by other experiences. We can acknowledge and rejoice in these other experiences that contribute to a person's spiritual life. Nonetheless, people should not be led into confusing these experiences with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is the baptism in the Holy Spirit that endues a person with power for ministry. Nothing else can take its place.

12. Is tongues the only evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and a Spirit-filled life?

Tongues are not the only evidence of a Spirit-filled life, but they are always the initial or first evidence that one has been baptized in the Holy Spirit as the entrance into a Spirit-filled life. One purpose of baptism in the Spirit is to empower the believer for witness; therefore, enthusiasm and boldness in witnessing, divine guidance and enabling in the presentation of the gospel, and miraculous manifestations of God's power before unbelievers all may serve as additional evidences of baptism in the Holy Spirit, though not as substitutions for speaking in tongues.

The Spirit-filled life should also demonstrate progressive development toward a complete Christlike character. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23) should be developing in the life of every believer. It has been observed that some who have received the baptism in the Holy Spirit and claim to be living Spirit-filled lives demonstrate less evidence of the fruit of the Spirit than some who have not received the Baptism experience. Such a fact does not destroy the truth that the Spirit takes raw material and, if given the opportunity, helps develop Christlike character traits in every believer. Yet development of the fruit of the Spirit can and should be enhanced in those who have been filled with the Spirit.

Other supernatural gifts of the Spirit (besides speaking in tongues), though sometimes seemingly evident in the lives of believers who have not been baptized in the Spirit, do not in themselves give evidence of having been baptized in the Spirit. The pre-Pentecost manifestation of supernatural gifts is still possible today, but the baptism in the Holy Spirit opens the door to a dynamic and more effective operation of the supernatural gifts. See Question 13 and its response.

13. Can believers who have not experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit minister with supernatural signs following?

As the question is stated, the answer must be yes. Mark 16:17 speaks of signs following "those who believe." Yet the promise to believers before the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). The power is a supernatural divine power consistently doing supernatural things through Spirit-filled believers.

The question might better be asked, "Is there any difference between the frequency and effectiveness of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit in the life of a believer after being baptized in the Holy Spirit?" The Bible records many miraculous demonstrations of the supernatural in the lives of Old Testament individuals, and in the lives of New Testament believers before as well as after their Baptism experience. When Jesus sent out the pre-Pentecost 70, they returned reporting with joy, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17).

But there was definitely a higher incidence of spiritual gifts operating through Spirit-filled members of the Early Church than there were prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon yielded believers. Miracles were wrought through people like Stephen and Philip who did not have apostolic positions (Acts

6:8 and 8:6,7). The full range of gifts was everywhere seen after the Day of Pentecost. It was as if a high-octane fuel additive propelled the Church to incredible growth and outreach. Activity after the Day of Pentecost was not just an extension of activity before the great outpouring. The Church had experienced a major empowerment for more effective ministry. The baptism in the Holy Spirit, with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues, is the doorway leading to a greatly empowered church of Jesus Christ.

14. What about the person who is convinced he or she was baptized in the Holy Spirit in a definite encounter with God, but did not speak in tongues until some time later?

Since the Bible teaches and demonstrates that tongues are the initial evidence of receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Church cannot confirm the opinion of the individual until he or she actually speaks in tongues. But neither can we depreciate a special experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit of God. One might describe such an in-between time as involvement in a process that culminates when the person speaks in tongues. To take any other position on the question would open the door to individuals claiming to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, without having received the biblical evidence of speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, and feeling content with what they already have experienced spiritually.

15. What is the relationship of John 20:22 with Acts 1:8 and Acts 2:4?

John 20:22 is important to understanding the full ministry of the Holy Spirit. This verse records the disciples' receiving the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit before the Day of Pentecost (under the New Covenant founded on the resurrection of the crucified Jesus). The Acts 2:4 experience occurred after the disciples' regeneration by the Holy Spirit, as a separate and distinct work of the Spirit. The regeneration and the Spirit baptism experiences are normative for all believers. Thus all believers receive the Holy Spirit at salvation or regeneration. After this regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, every believer can experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the endowment of power to be more effective witnesses (Acts 1:8; 2:4; 2:39).

Some have suggested that John 20:22 was merely a symbolic promise of the Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost. But the Greek aorist imperative for "receive" indicates that an action took place at that time, not sometime later. John recorded an historical event which had its own significance for the normative experiences of every believer today.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

² Vinson Synan, "Policy Decisions on Tongues as an Indicator of Future Church Growth," Address to the Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Orlando, Florida, November 20, 1998.

³ Throughout Scripture, some kind of supernaturally inspired speech accompanies the giving of the Spirit. For example, it is said of the elders of Israel, "When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again" (Numbers 11:25). The prophet Samuel told Saul, "The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power and you will prophesy. . ." (1 Samuel 10:6,10). When God gave the promise to Joel, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people," He added, "Your sons and daughters will prophesy. . ." (Joel 2:28). In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is most often active in prophesying through specially selected human beings. The Spirit is quite literally the Spirit of prophecy, and some form of verbal proclamation, perhaps along with other power phenomena, is the special sign of His coming. In the New Testament, the Pentecost phenomena are consistent with this promise, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). The word "enabled" is from the Greek verb *apophthengomai* which means "to speak" usually in connection with an inspired utterance, i.e., "to speak as a prophet." The same word is found in Acts 2:14 where Peter "addressed" the crowd. Luke understood Peter's "address" to be prophetic, a sign that the Spirit had come in power as prophesied by Joel.

⁴ "Being continually filled with the Spirit" is the meaning of the tense of the Greek word.

⁵ Speaking with (or in) other tongues refers to the ability the Holy Spirit gives believers to speak in languages they have not learned. While the Greek word *glossa* literally means "a tongue," in antiquity the word was also frequently used with the meaning of "a language." The technical term for this usage of one word (tongue) to indicate a related concept (language) is metonymy.

⁶ Neither are such widely accepted theological terms as *Trinity* and *Incarnation* found in Scripture.

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- ⁷ I.e., people are baptized only once as a first-time expression of faith in Christ and entry into the community of the Church.
- ⁸ At the very outset of Jesus' ministry, each one of the Gospel writers emphasizes the prophecy of John the Baptist, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11; see also Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Jesus himself reiterated the prophecy to His disciples just before His ascension, "Öin a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). Jesus also explicitly commanded the disciples to "wait" for the promised gift of the Spirit (Acts 1:4; cf. Luke 24:49) described by Him as being "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49) and "powerÖ[to] be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). For the disciples, the promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit came in dynamic and powerful ways, filling them with His presence and enabling them to speak prophetically in other tongues (Acts 2:1-4). True to the baptismal language of the biblical promise, Pentecostal believers have referred to the Spirit's coming in power as "the baptism in the Holy Spirit."
- ⁹ The Holy Spirit baptizes *into the body of Christ* at conversion; Christ baptizes *in the Spirit* at Spirit baptism.
- ¹⁰ Though conversion and Spirit baptism appear in this instance to be simultaneous because Baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues follows conversion so quickly, there is still a chronological distinction in the two experiences.
- ¹¹ "As the Spirit gave them utterance" (KJV) does not mean that some who were baptized spoke in tongues while others did not. It simply means that *all* spoke in tongues prompted by the Holy Spirit. Speaking with other tongues as the Holy Spirit gives utterance is not achieved through a heightened emotional state or through the repetition of words and phrases. It is not the result of imitating the sounds made by others. To the contrary, human attempts to speak with tongues only stand in the way of the utterance the Holy Spirit gives. The believer speaks by the supernatural, motivating power of the Spirit, although willing cooperation is required. One needs only to respond in faith and speak out as the Spirit gives utterance. Any manipulative technique for receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit is without biblical pattern or propriety.
- ¹² The King James translation "*since* ye believed" is more accurate than "when." The Greek *pisteusantes* is an aorist active participle more accurately translated as "having believed," indicating that the believing took place prior to the action Paul is asking about.
- ¹³ See Ralph W. Harris, *Acts Today: Signs and Wonders of the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1995). Includes documented instances of individuals speaking in French, Croatian, Chinese, Ukrainian, and Aramaic-Hebrew, despite a lack of any training in those languages.
- ¹⁴ The sound of wind and the sight of tongues of fire preceded and were external to the disciples' personal experience.
- ¹⁵ For all its importance as initial evidence, speaking in tongues is not the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, according to Jesus' words in Acts 1:8, is to empower believers to be witnesses. The Greek word translated "power" is *dynamis*, or the power and ability to get things done. God's Great Commission is the evangelization of the world. As the Book of Acts clearly shows, evangelizing the world is to be done in the power of the Spirit. Powerful proclamation of the gospel, healings, casting out of demons, raising the dead are all clearly seen in the Book of Acts as Spirit-empowered believers, after being baptized in the Holy Spirit, bore witness to the saving power of Jesus. All of these powerful signs of God's presence are available to the Church today. When a believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, he/she should expect to become an agent of God's power in this world.
- ¹⁶ The fruit of the Spirit result from the sanctification process which must take place continually after conversion.
- ¹⁷ For a complete biblical description of the gifts of the Spirit, see 1 Corinthians 12:1-11,27-30; Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:11.
- ¹⁸ See *Christian History*, Issue 58 (Spring 1998).