

The Baptism In The Holy Spirit

There is something fascinating about the prophets of Israel. It is the fact that after calling attention to the ways in which the nation of Israel had turned from God through idolatry, lying, stealing, immorality and violent behavior; after pronouncing judgment on the people for their perverted ways; after declaring severe punishments for those sins, great promises of blessings were offered for the future.

Two good examples are Isaiah and Joel. Isaiah manifested in his oracles a stream of consciousness that ran the gamut of God's reactions and hopes for His people. He verbally pummeled the people for trusting in Egypt instead of Yahweh for help against their enemies; he denounced their fear of the Assyrian hordes who threatened their existence; he decried their idolatry, their fornication, their dishonesty, their murders ... then he foresaw great blessings for the remnant God would preserve. He prophesied the demise of Jerusalem, how it would be "a wasteland, the delight of donkeys, a pasture for the flocks, till the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness will live in the fertile field." (Isaiah 32:14-16)

Joel also bemoaned the state of the people of Israel, making the same charges against them, and exposing the depressing consequences of their disobedience. But then he promised a time when all that had been lost would be restored, that God would demonstrate his fealty and free them from their shame. "And afterward, 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)

The Stage Is Set For A Blessing

Decades after these promises were made, the city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and the Jews were taken into exile. Some seventy years later, many of them returned, a "remnant" of what used to be there. But the above promise was not then fulfilled. Hundreds of years later, Jesus came on the scene. In preparation for Jesus' ministry, John the Baptist began his work, calling upon the people to repent and be baptized as a show of repentance. In speaking to the crowds, John made this declaration: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." (Matthew 3:11)

Then Jesus burst on the scene, selecting twelve men to be his intimate friends and followers, and demonstrating the love and power of God for the next three years. Knowing He would soon be executed on the cross, Jesus observed the Passover celebration with these twelve men, and during the evening he prepared them for his absence. He assured them of His ongoing care for them and how God the Father would employ them in the spreading of the Gospel. He was keenly aware of their inability as humans to fulfill their mission unaided. Of particular interest is what Jesus shared in John Chapters 14-16, where He described the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

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The Promised Holy Spirit

Jesus told his disciples, "If you love me, you will obey what I command, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever -- the Spirit of the truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you ...But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14: 15-17, 26) He continued encouraging them and alerted them to the mission of the Holy Spirit in John 15:26: "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me."

The one thing the disciples did not want was the departure of Jesus. But he showed why that had to happen in John 16:7-14 "...Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."

The following day Jesus was arrested, subjected to a mock trial, condemned and crucified. Two days later He rose from the dead and began the appearances which restored their faith in Him and His promises. Just before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told His disciples, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.... But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:4,5,8)

The Holy Spirit Arrives

In obedience to His words, the disciples remained in Jerusalem, hiding from the authorities, searching through the Word of God for understanding and praying. The Book of Acts, chapter 2, describes what happened next. "When the Day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:1-4)

The phenomenon drew the attention of thousands of visitors to Jerusalem, devout Jews who had come to celebrate Pentecost. When they asked what had happened, the Apostle Peter acted as spokesman and declared: "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people,'" and quoted the

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rest of the verses mentioned above. (Acts 2:16-21) When his witness about Jesus touched the hearts of many in the crowd, he was asked by the people, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

According to Acts 2:38, 39, "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off --for all whom the Lord our God will call.'" This was a gift that was available to all whom the Lord would call, not just a select few. It was a gift that produced observable results which changed the lives of those who experienced it.

Manifestations of Holy Spirit Baptism

As the Church grew, it spread out from Jerusalem to surrounding areas. Soon there were disciples in Samaria, north of Jerusalem, an area that was avoided by the Jews due to their racial prejudices. In Acts 8:17,-19 we find the record of what subsequently transpired. "When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not 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." This is a case where the baptism in the Holy Spirit was accompanied by the "laying on of hands." God had even more marvelous things to perform, however. Not long after this occasion, an incident occurred which did not involve the physical act of placing hands on the persons receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This occurred during a visit by the Apostle Peter to the home of a Roman Centurion named Cornelius, an officer of the Roman army. Peter, being a Jew, would never have gone into the home of a non-Jew, but God intervened and set up the event. Peter was declaring to them the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins through His name. Acts 10: 44-46 says, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers [Christian Jews] 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."

So in this case the Holy Spirit fell on those who heard the word. No laying on of hands preceded it. The evidence to the Jewish believers was that these Gentiles [non-Jews] were speaking "in tongues" and praising God. They, like the believers at Pentecost in Jerusalem, had been taken into an ecstatic state and given utterance in a language other than their native tongue. This was one evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Peter's reaction is recorded in Acts 10:47. "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." He then ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus. When Peter and his companions returned to Jerusalem, a conflict arose with the other brothers because he had entered the home of a Gentile. Peter told the whole story of how God had impelled him to the house of Cornelius, and in Acts 11:15, 16 he declared, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the

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beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 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!"

Another occasion when the baptism of the Holy Spirit is mentioned is in Acts 19:1-7. The disciples in Ephesus had received baptism in water in "John's baptism," but not in the Holy Spirit. In verse 4 it says, "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.' On hearing this they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." Here the order of events is different. They hear the message and are baptized in water, then the Holy Spirit comes on them and the evidence of speaking in tongues is manifest, plus a new evidence: They prophesied. That is, they were given specific messages or utterances declaring the mind of God, in this case in the commonly understood language. These are two of what are known as "the gifts of the Spirit," speaking in an unlearned language and prophesying.

Debate Over The Baptism In The Holy Spirit

Over the ensuing centuries, differences of opinion have developed as to the nature and the importance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Some see it as a one-time event, an intense experience that one has at the beginning of the Christian walk, and then assumes the presence of that relationship. For such, one simply trusts in that reality, even though there are

no particular experiences in life that would mirror the things mentioned in the above verses.

While it is true that the Holy Spirit remains with the believer beyond conversion, this reality called the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a docile, innocuous thing. Paul wrote to the Ephesian church, and his counsel was this: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit." He then describes that Spirit-filled life: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:18-20) The thrust of this counsel is to keep on getting filled with the Holy Spirit, to get as it were, intoxicated on Him. When we live in that state, we are filled with these wonderful things: Gratitude, music in our hearts that honors God, love for others and additional attributes that agree with the heart of God.

The Object Of The Baptism In The Holy Spirit :

The object of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not just to make us feel good, however. There are far more important reasons for God the Father to dispense this wonderful gift. One is revealed in Acts 1:8, as was referenced earlier. That is where Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem. Then He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." So the primary reason given for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is to endue power to bear witness to Christ, to declare and demonstrate in our living that Jesus is Lord of our lives.

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Another essential reason for the presence of the Holy Spirit and His power is that what are called the "Fruit of the Spirit" can be grown in our character. This is explained in Galatians 5: 22-25. After delineating the works of the flesh; immorality, idolatry, witchcraft, fits of rage, etc., Paul says "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature [or, flesh] with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." So then, one objective of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to enable us to bear righteous fruit, the very character of God.

An essential part of this mix is the fact that the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, into our persons, in order to empower communion, fellowship, spiritual intercourse, between the believer and God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. John declares in 1 John 1:3, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ." We receive an insight into this fellowship in John 17: 21-23. "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me."

This fellowship by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is much more than an isolated event in the life of the Christian. It is much more than an emotional experience that may fade over time. Oh, to be sure, there is great emotion involved in the immersion

into the Holy Spirit. Above that, however, is a reality the world cannot begin to understand: We become one with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The very life and presence of God dwells in our mortal bodies and empowers us to hold his being in ourselves. We are in Him. He is in us. That is why the Apostle Paul could say, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself?" (1 Corinthians 6:15) This is a work of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Anyone who has come to know God understands that His motivation is one of love, of benevolence, and that all He does is for the benefit of His creatures. So it is no surprise then to discover that one of the objectives of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is to bestow gifts which will build up the Christian community. Paul infers this in 1 Corinthians 14:12 when he says, "Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts [or gifts of the Spirit], try to excel in gifts that build up the church." Earlier, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, he has made the point that as Christians, we are individual members of the Body of Christ. As the human body is made of many members which work together for the good of the whole body, so the members of the Body of Christ should work together for the common good. That is the objective of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Gifts Of The Spirit

These gifts are described in 1 Corinthians 12: 7-11 by the Apostle Paul: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one

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Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another the ability to speak in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”

Note that in verse 7 we are told that the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. That is one reason for the gifts of the Spirit, a product of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. We find a similar statement in Ephesians 4:11-13 where again the Apostle Paul is discussing the gifts we receive from the hand of Christ. He says, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up; until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Anointing To Know God.

Remember we read earlier in John 14:26, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” This reflects another ministry of the Holy Spirit, that of teaching. There is a work that He does which no one else can do, that of teaching us about God. The Apostle John refers to this at 1 John 2:27. “As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit -- just as it has taught you, remain

in him.” So the Holy Spirit is our teacher. That is one of the blessings that comes with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and it should be cherished.

This is not to say that we cannot learn from one another. To the contrary, Ephesians 4 which we quoted above tells us Jesus has given us pastors and teachers to prepare us. The teachers in the Body of Christ are essential to our growth to maturity. But there is a teaching done by the Holy Spirit that no human can accomplish for us, which is what enables us to know that truth has been spoken when we hear it from the lips of those God-given teachers.

The Essential Need For The Holy Spirit

Though there may be differences of opinion among Christians as to the details of how the Baptism of the Holy Spirit affects our lives, there is general agreement to the statement that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is vital to our Christian walk. Pray that God will grant you the fullness of His Holy Spirit and the power the Spirit gives to live for Christ. This is something God gives to those who desire it, those who earnestly seek God. In this regard, consider the counsel of the Wonderful Counselor, Jesus Christ. “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7,8)

In the language of the Scriptures, Jesus is saying this: “Ask and keep asking; seek and keep seeking; knock and keep knocking.” The Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the immersion into the presence of God, and the attendant gifts of the Holy Spirit are for those who earnestly pursue God for them;

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for those who truly desire them and do not tire of drawing close to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Those who yearn for the presence of God in their lives will discover that they have found that priceless treasure. And when Paul says to “be filled with the Holy Spirit,” he is talking about an ongoing experience, not a once-in-awhile event. One is either full of the Holy Spirit or full of themselves. So having received this blessed relationship, let us continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

We invite your response to this message.
If you have prayed to receive Christ,
please let us know, and seek out a
church where Jesus is the focus of
attention. If you feel led to contribute to
this effort, send correspondence to:

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