

Baptism with the Spirit: A Scriptural Study

Based on Acts 2: 1-13

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The last quarter of the 19th Century was a period of dramatic change in most phases of American life. No aspect of our nation escaped the scrutiny of the critics. In particular, the religious life in America was subjected to heavy criticism. Before 1900 traditional Protestantism emphasized individualism and seemed to neglect the pressing problems of society. Many American writers from 1870 to 1900 engaged in a concerted attack on what they considered “an outmoded theology.”

Edward Eggleston wrote an 1873 novel, *The Circuit Rider* questioning his own Methodist Church saying its old ways had “outlived their usefulness.” John W. DeForest wrote *The Wetheral Affair* calling for “an accommodation with the evolutionary theories of Darwin along with a more rational thought which could lead to social salvation.”

The culmination of it all was found in Walter Rauschenbush, a Baptist minister and teacher at Rochester Theological Seminary whose brainchild was what was called the “social gospel.” Rauschenbush, and his Christian Socialism, saw sin in terms of the problems of society and salvation was not so much personal as corporate. It called for “a social conversion” of America’s life. This movement deeply affected all the major churches in America, but none so deeply as the Methodist Church, which by 1908 had adopted The Social Creed of the Churches and joined the newly created Federal Council of Churches, which was the forerunner of the National Council of Churches.

Traditionally the Methodist Church taught the possibility of “entire sanctification.” First a person was saved by believing in Christ and then made perfect by a second work of grace. When the Methodists as a denomination turned away from a stress on the individual and started down the road of liberalism, thousands of people left. Through these people, who clung to the idea of a second work of grace, came what are today called the Holiness and Pentecostal Churches. A core doctrine of the Pentecostal-Holiness movement was always the idea of a work of the Holy Spirit after salvation to change a person’s life. This was usually referred to as “the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

Along the way a fellow named Charles F. Parham added a new twist. He started a school called Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. It was there that Parham and his students decided that the scriptural evidence for receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was “speaking with other tongues.” The school conducted a watch night service on December 31, 1899, in which a young lady named Agnes N. Ozman requested Parham to lay hands on her head to pray for her to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Shortly after midnight on the first day of the 20th century Miss Ozman had her experience and reportedly “spoke in Chinese while a halo surrounded her head and face.” Out of that event grew what we know as modern Pentecostalism or the teaching that believers are to be baptized in the Spirit and speak in tongues. For the next 60 years these Pentecostal churches remained distinct from the major denominations that had turned to social action and liberalism.

Then, in 1960, Father Dennis Bennett, rector of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, got up and announced to his congregation that he had also experienced this baptism. From Dennis Bennett and that church, came a new dimension. Soon people from all the mainline denominations were claiming this baptism and tongues speaking and so the charismatic movement was born. Today, many years later,

millions of people from Lutherans to Baptists to Catholics to Episcopalians claim this experience. And while there are a lot of variations among the different groups, the common denominator is the baptism. We are told that the Holy Spirit comes to live in a person when we are saved, but he does not exhibit His power without a second experience called “the baptism,” evidenced by speaking in tongues.

Continuously I have people asking me questions about this issue. What is happening when people claim this experience? If God wants to empower me in this way why doesn't our church teach the same doctrine? Am I missing out on something that God was to do in my life? All of these are very important questions. If there is one thing we desire, it's that believers be used of God and experience His blessing to the fullest. We do not want to hinder the working of God, we do not want to stifle the spirit, we want to be open to what He's doing so that God can be glorified through our lives. The most important question that a believer can settle from the scriptures is how do I live for Christ? How do I have victory over sin? Where does my power come from? Do I have what I need in Christ through my salvation, or do I need something more? Those questions are answered by a correct understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Acts is a book of beginnings. It is a historical account by Luke telling us just how things got started in Christianity. The first chapter sets the stage for the action to follow. There we find Jesus' last words to His disciples before His ascension back into Heaven. He gives them a command and reminds them of a promise that has its fulfillment in the passage that is the foundation for this study.

Acts 1:4 gives us that promise. *And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”* Ten days later, as the 120 were gathered in the upper room that promise of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled. Let's look there and as we do I want you to see first of all that God gave clear indisputable evidence that the Holy Spirit had come. Acts 2:1-4 *Now when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

God, through Moses, commanded Israel to keep seven feasts, or holy celebrations, each year. The fourth of those celebrations came 50 days after Passover, and was called the Feast of Pentecost. This feast signified the beginning of the harvest. In fact, sometimes it was known as the Feast of Harvest. Each of these feasts had prophetic significance.

The first was Passover. It was a memorial to God's deliverance of his people from bondage of Egypt and through the blood of a lamb. It pointed to Christ our Passover Lamb. The second was the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This feast pointed to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Leaven is often a symbol for sin in the Bible. When Christ died and was buried, the penalty for sin was removed. The third feast was called First Fruits. This points to the resurrection. The Jewish people were to bring in the very first of their crops for an offering. The New Testament says that Christ is the first fruits of those who sleep. He's the first of many who will be resurrected. The fourth feast is Pentecost, The Feast of Harvest. Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples to bring in the harvest. They were to go into all the world and preach the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit who would be given.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came. The harvest began. On this very day, out of the hundreds of thousands of Jewish people gathered from all over the ancient world, 3000 would come to believe on Jesus Christ as Savior. The harvest had begun in the Holy Spirit's Power. The coming of the Holy Spirit was both seen and heard. There were three signs that God provided to verify that the fulfillment of the feast had come

First, there was a sound from heaven as of a mighty, rushing wind. According to verse 2 *Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.* It's important to note that this verse does not say that a wind blew through the upper room where they were. It was a sound that filled the room. A sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind. The word "as" denotes symbolism.

There are a number of important symbols in verse 2, the most important of which is in the word "wind." The Greek word for wind, πνευμα, is the same word that is used for Spirit. We bring the word πνευμα over into English through words like "pneumonia," a disease of the lungs, or "pneumatic," meaning that some tool or machine is driven by air. In theology the study of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is known as "Pneumatology", the study of the Holy Spirit. Another passage where spirit and wind are tied closely together is in John 3. There Jesus said, *the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is every one who is born of the Spirit.* The stress in Acts 2 and John 3 is on empowerment

The second sign that showed that the feast had come is identified in verse 3, *Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.* Notice that God again uses symbolism in the retelling of what happened on that day. The passage does not say that these tongues were fire, but they were *as* of fire. They sat on each one of them to show that each one, without exception, had received the promise of the Father. They were visible proof that the Holy Spirit had come.

It is interesting to note here that at this point Matthew recorded the fact that Jesus would one day baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Some people have tried to read that promise back in this Acts passage and have come up with some bizarre ideas. Matthew 3:1,7,11&12 reads, *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

In 1895 a fellow named Benjamin Irwin founded what is known today as the Fire Baptized Holiness Churches. Irwin said that individuals not only needed the baptism of the Spirit but that also God performs a third work of grace, or the baptism of fire. There are a few of these churches left today, almost exclusively in the South, but at one time there were thousands and thousands of people claiming to have the baptism of fire.

As usual we need to let scripture interpret scripture. *His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

The baptism of the Spirit is reserved for believers. The baptism of fire is reserved for unbelievers. The wheat is gathered into the barn, the unusable chaff is burned with unquenchable fire. This is the wrath to come, an obvious reference to eternal punishment. Jesus Christ never promised us the baptism of fire.

That is something that is reserved for those who fail to trust in Him.

It's important for us to see things like this because it's an example of people misusing the scriptures, but at the same time having some experience which they thought was from God. The fire baptized followers spoke in tongues, had all the common Charismatic manifestations, and yet whatever they experienced was not based on scripture. If anything, the symbolism of wind and fire in Acts 2 show power and purity.

The third sign in Acts 2 that the Holy Spirit had come, was seen in what the disciples did next. *They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.* Acts 2:4. Clearly we can see that speaking in tongues does not mean ecstatic speech. It doesn't mean going into a trance. It's not some special prayer language given to communicate with God.

Verses 5-13: *Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these whom speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in their own tongues the wonderful works of God." So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?" Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."*

There were three things that demonstrated that Jesus' promise of baptism with the Spirit was fulfilled, all of which were tied into the idea of Pentecost and the harvest. The harvest (the gathering in of people from other nations) would start with the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower the disciples. The Holy Spirit came with a sound, with the appearance of fire, and with the speaking of different languages.

It's critical that we keep in mind the reason why these things are happening or we'll misunderstand the truth of Scripture. Acts is a book of history, recording what took place, not necessarily a record of normative doctrine. Acts is a book of transition. Before Jesus came all kinds of miraculous things were not taking place. During His life His miracles were to authenticate His Messiahship. After His departure, miracles were done by the apostles as God used signs and wonders to confirm what He was doing through His apostles. As the church was established and the New Testament written, those signs quickly faded.

Here in Acts 2 the miraculous aspect is clearly associated with the feast of Pentecost. The essential fact of Pentecost isn't wind, fire, or speaking in tongues, but the fact that those things demonstrated that the Holy Spirit had been given to the church. These events were given as signs to confirm that the fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost was satisfied.

The heart of the charismatic message that we hear from so many today is that you, as a believer, might have the Holy Spirit within you, but as far as the Holy Spirit's power to overcome sin, to really serve the Lord, that only comes through the experience of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. The baptism is described as something that happens subsequent to the time when your forgiven by faith in Christ, and it's

an experience that is at least somewhat similar to what the disciples went through in Acts 2. Therefore the baptism of the Spirit is normally associated with speaking in tongues.

A key passage in understanding this baptism of the Holy Spirit is I Corinthians 12:12&13. Actually

I Corinthians 12:12-31 is a unit. The emphasis of the rest of the chapter is on the unified nature of spiritual gifts as they function in the spiritual body of Christ. Verse 12 sets the stage. Here Paul clues us in to a very important fact by using a beautiful analogy. *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

“For” sets the comparison. For as the body, meaning the human body, is one organic whole and yet has many parts and all the parts of that body are different, they still form one body. Your physical body is one entity despite all the many components that make it up. Or, looking at it from the other direction: all the parts of your body, even though there is an overwhelming number of them, still blend together into one structure.

In the same way, so also is Christ. Jesus Christ is seated bodily at the right hand of God today. He ascended from the Mount of Olives (Acts, Chapter 1) and He remains there. And yet at the same time He has a body here on earth to carry out his work in the world. That body is the church. It’s composed of every believer, but is still one body. *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.* (Verse 27). This is a fantastic truth! The body which we belong to possesses one life, and that life belongs to none other than Jesus Christ.

Now, since that is true, a question naturally asked is: “How do individual believers become part of the body of Christ? By what action of God are we made a member of part of the body?” The answer is in this chapter, verse 13. *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.* The human body is conceived and born with all of its members present, but believing sinners became part of the body of Christ through Spirit baptism.

Notice Paul includes himself here. This is true of every Christian. The moment you believe in Christ as Savior you become part of the body through Spirit baptism. This is not a second working of grace. This is concurrent with salvation. It is true of all. The moment that a person realizes that they have sinned against God and put their trust in Christ as their Savior, they are justified, they are forgiven, they are redeemed and they are baptized by (or in, the same word) the Spirit. There are commands in the New Testament for us to be controlled by the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit and to yield to the Holy Spirit. There are no commands to be baptized in the Spirit, because every Christian already is.

Remember, at the point of salvation, God has given everything needed to live for Him. Paul told the Colossians *You are complete in Him!* Peter wrote *according to His divine power (God) has given to us all things that pertain to life and Godliness.* Watch out for anyone who tries to convince you that as a Christian you are incomplete or that God has some experience to give you that will make you what you could be.

How important it is to understand the issue of Spirit baptism. The way we see this issue is going to determine our approach to the Christian life.

Now, putting this all together and going back to acts 2, we can see what was happening. John the Baptist said when Jesus came He would baptize with the Holy Spirit. Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism of the Spirit. When the day of Pentecost came the Spirit baptized the disciples and the harvest of the nations began. The church was born that day as the first group of believers were placed into the body of Christ. God enabled the disciples (or at least the Galileans, not the whole 120) to speak in the various languages of all these devout Jews of the Diaspora who were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. When this sound occurred, in other words, the sound of these men speaking, the multitude came together.

There is just one verse in the entire New Testament that tells us the specific purpose of the gift that God gave of being able to speak in other languages. I Corinthians 14:22, . . . *Tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers.* On the day of Pentecost, tongues were used for their Biblical purpose. They were a sign that God was at work. Thousands of Jews were attracted by that sign and using it as a forum, Peter preached about Jesus the Messiah. When they heard, about 3000 of those Jewish worshippers trusted Jesus Christ and Peter and the others knew that God had begun to fulfill His work of harvesting the nations through them.

This was a unique experience. The birth of the church and the events that took place there were unique events that serve as a specific purpose. Remember, there is no sign, experience, or feeling to prove that you are baptized with the Holy Spirit. You have something even more sure and more firm than that, you have the promise of God. *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.* (I Corinthians 12:13).

Do we need power for our Christian lives? We definitely do. Do we need God's strength to continue working in the harvest? There is no question. Do we need victory over sin and self? Certainly, we do.

But that power does not come through seeking something we already have. God commands us to be continually filled or controlled by the Spirit. That is not an experience to have. It is a commitment to make. A believer today does not need a Pentecost in his life. We have already been baptized with the Holy Spirit by the Lord Jesus Christ. What we need to do is yield to the Spirit, who is already there. Then we will have the Spirit's power.

Nowhere in Scripture is the Christian taught to linger and wait for the baptism. Nowhere in Scripture are we taught to get with a group of people who will teach, or speak in tongues. There is one sure way to know the power of the Spirit in your life: obey the Lord. As you walk in obedience to the word of God, in submission to the Spirit, then the Holy Spirit will energize your life. The essential question is not, have you had some overwhelming emotional experience, it is who is in control? Are you submitting to the Spirit who is in you?