

SHOULD YOU SEEK THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT?

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If you step into a Christian bookstore, you will find books on the Holy Spirit in general and the baptism of the Holy Spirit in particular. If you tune in a Christian radio program, you are likely to hear a preacher extolling the benefits of the Holy Spirit and exhorting you to seek the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” If you turn on your TV to a Christian station, you will probably see a Christian celebrity giving his testimony. He will tell you how he was in sin, was saved, and how he sought and secured the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now he is satisfied in singing the praises of the Lord. Then you might just meet an old friend, or even a family member, or fellow worker, who will tell you she recently received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In glowing terms, she will tell you of her glorious experience.

It all makes you wonder. Should you seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit? After all, it is so widespread. Multiplied millions of Americans consider themselves Pentecostal or “charismatic.” The movement is worldwide and growing. Furthermore, those who claim the experience not only exist in large numbers, they are also excited and enthusiastic. When you meet them, you are tempted to think they have something that you do not have. So, you may feel that you should also seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

What does the Bible say? In order to determine whether you should seek the experience called the baptism of the Holy Spirit, consider what the New Testament teaches about it. Here is an explanation of every reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

SPIRITUAL BAPTISM WAS PREDICTED

John the Baptist Spiritual baptism was predicted before it occurred. In the Gospels, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is mentioned by name four times: in Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, and John 1:33. Actually, these are four accounts of the same event. John the Baptist was contrasting his physical baptism with Jesus’ spiritual baptism. He was not talking about something Jesus was doing then, but something that would happen in the future. He was predicting the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus In the book of Acts, Jesus predicted that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was coming. Luke records, “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’” (Acts 1:4-5). In the upper room discourse, the disciples heard Jesus speak of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:7-15). Now in Acts 1, Jesus tells them that the Holy Spirit is about to come “not many days from now,” an obvious reference to the Day of Pentecost.

The point is that Jesus and John the Baptist *predicted the baptism of the Holy Spirit before it occurred*. These first five references are prophetic. That means that there are no

occurrences of it in the Gospels. Some say that John 20:22 is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That cannot be, because at the time of Jesus' ascension it was still future (Acts 1:5, 8, 9).

SPIRITUAL BAPTISM OCCURRED

There are four occurrences of spiritual baptism in the book of Acts (Acts, 2, 8, 10, 19). Acts 2, 8 and 10 do not say that what occurred was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2 says that believers were "filled" with the Holy Spirit. Acts 8 says that they "received" the Holy Spirit. Acts 10 says that the Holy Spirit "fell" on them.

When Peter, however, went back to Jerusalem to explain what happened in Acts 10, he called what happened in Acts 10 the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 11:15-16) and said that it was the same thing that happened "at the beginning." Since the baptism was still future in Acts 1, "the beginning" must have been in Acts 2. So, the book of Acts itself says that what happened in Acts 2, 10, and 19 was the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Although Acts 8 does not say that what happened in Samaria was the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it is generally agreed that it was. Hence, the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurred four times in the book of Acts.

First Occurrence After spiritual baptism was predicted in the Gospels and in Acts 1, it occurred first on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. All present in Acts 2 were Jews (Acts 2:1, 5).

In this case, the disciples were told to "tarry" (Lk. 24:49). From this, some have concluded that in order to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, one must tarry. That is not the point. This is the only time anyone, anywhere in the New Testament, tarried for the baptism of the Holy Spirit or anything connected with the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word *tarry* simply means "to sit." Tarrying is not agonizing or praying through; it is simply waiting (Acts 1:4). As Harry Ironside observed, "From this point on, that is, from Acts 2, we never hear again of this baptism as something to be waited for, prayed for, or expected" (H. A. Ironside, *Holiness: False and True*, p. 95).

Why then were they told to tarry? The answer is in Acts 2:1, which says, "When the day of Pentecost had fully come." They needed to wait for the Feast of Pentecost. According to the Old Testament, Israel was to observe feasts (religious celebrations) during the year. One was the Passover, which celebrated Israel's deliverance from Egypt. God judged Egypt, but passed over and delivered Israel, hence the Passover celebration. Another was the Feast of Tabernacles. During this feast, they dwelt in booths as a reminder of the Fatherly care of God while they were journeying from Egypt to Canaan. Pentecost was also one of these feasts. It got its name from the fact that it was celebrated fifty days after Passover (Lev. 23:16). The Hebrew text says *fifty*; the Greek word for *fifty* is Pentecost. The Scriptures do not attach any historical significance to this festival, but seem to indicate that Pentecost owes its origin to the harvest, which terminated at this time. Therefore, Jesus was telling them to wait for the feast, the festival of Pentecost.

Why wait for Pentecost? The answer is that the Jewish feasts were types, a form of prophecy. Christ's death was the fulfillment of Passover (1 Cor. 5:7); Jesus fulfilled the feast of Passover when He died. God intended the coming of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the Feast of Pentecost. So the apostles were told to wait for that festival day to arrive.

The Second Occurrence The second incidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is in Acts 8. In this case, the baptism of the Holy Spirit happened to Samaritans (Acts 8:5, 14). It did not happen in Acts 8 as it did in Acts 2. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit fell directly; there was no human agent. In Acts 8, there was a human agent, the laying on of hands of Peter and John, who came from Jerusalem (Acts 8:15-17).

Why was there laying on of hands in Acts 8? The answer is that the Jews hated the Samaritans. The Samaritans were half-breeds. Hence, the Jews would not have anything to do with them. If the Holy Spirit had come directly on the Samaritans as He did on the Jews, there would forever have been two mother churches. Therefore, in order to prevent division and produce unity, God had Peter and John laid hands on the Samaritans.

The Third Occurrence The third case of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is in Acts 10:44-48. This time it was on Gentiles (Acts 10:1, 2, 45). There was no tarrying, no laying on of hands, just the direct coming of the Holy Spirit on people the moment they believed.

The Fourth Occurrence The fourth and last occurrence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts is in chapter 19. This time some disciples of John the Baptist received the baptism.

Since spiritual baptism only happened four times in Acts and to four such different and distinct groups, it would appear that Acts is describing a transition period when Christianity spread from Jews to Gentiles. That fits all the facts, except for one thing. Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles—perfect! Why, after that, did the disciples of John the Baptist receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

The answer is in the purpose and plan of the book of Acts. This book is divided into two parts: the acts of Peter and the acts of Paul. F. F. Bruce has said, “This parallelism between ‘the acts of Peter’ and ‘the acts of Paul’ has long been noted and recognized as being due to the author’s intention to defend Paul’s apostolic dignity.” In short, whatever Peter does, Paul does. For example, both heal a lame man, which gets them into trouble. Both are arrested in the Temple and brought before the Sanhedrin. Both incur the jealousy of the Jews. Both are beaten. Both raise someone from the dead. Both are worshiped. Both are jailed. Both are delivered from jail. Both give the baptism of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands.

SPIRITUAL BAPTISM WAS EXPLAINED

It Puts Believers into the Body of Christ Only six verses in the Epistles refer to the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2: 12; 1 Pet. 3:21). These references make it clear that spiritual baptism places believers into Christ (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2: 12; 1 Pet. 3:21) and His body, the church (1 Cor. 12:13).

Some have taught that people need to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit in order to be cleansed or freed from sin. That is not the purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The blood of Christ cleanses from sin. The baptism of the Holy Spirit puts believers into Christ and into the body of Christ.

All Believers Have the Baptism First Corinthians 12:13 also teaches that all believers have the baptism. It says, “We were *all* baptized into one body.” That means that after the transition period in Acts, every person who trusted Christ received the Holy Spirit *at*

conversion. Ephesians 1:3 and Colossians 2:10 confirm this. When a person comes to Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to that individual.

Summary: The baptism of the Holy Spirit was predicted, it occurred, and it was explained.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit places believers into Christ and His body. All believers now have it.

Should you seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit? If you have trusted Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life, the answer is “No!” Why should you seek something you already have?

Those who urge you to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit use the book of Acts. Those who say that seeking it is not necessary, appeal to the Epistles. That is significant. The Gospels and Acts are history, that is, they record *what* happened. The Epistles are explanation, that is, they tell *why* it happened. For example, the Gospels tell us Christ died. The Epistles explain that death as redemption, reconciliation, etc. Likewise, Acts tells us that the Holy Spirit came. The Epistles explain that the baptism of the Holy Spirit puts believers into Christ and His body.

Are we supposed to teach the experience of the apostles in Acts or experience the teaching of the apostles in the Epistles? Obviously, we do not teach experience; we experience teaching.

If it is so important to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit, why is it never commanded in Scripture? No one in the New Testament ever asked for or sought the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nor was anyone ever told to do so. No requirements for spiritual baptism were ever given. In fact, the one person in the New Testament who wanted to seek something connected with the Holy Spirit was rebuked sharply (see Acts 8:18-24).

Martin Luther once said of Andreas Carlstadt, a German theologian, “He wants to teach you not how the Holy Spirit comes to you, but how you come to the Spirit.” Carlstadt had it backwards, as many do today. When you trust Christ, you receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So you do not need to pray to receive the Holy Spirit. You need to pray for an understanding of the power you have (Eph. 1:18-19).

Years ago, the body of a seventy-two-year-old lady was found in a hallway outside of a three-room apartment in New York City. When the police entered the apartment, they found Nellie Corrigan in ragged, soiled clothing, wandering about asking for her sister Mary. She was wandering aimlessly about her apartment carrying a canvas bag and several pocketbooks.

Upon investigation, the police found \$50,000 in cash in her pocketbooks. A search of the apartment came up with nearly a dozen bankbooks showing deposits totaling more than \$100,000! They discovered uncashed city checks and a number of securities. Nellie was rich, yet she lived on a \$167 monthly pension.

Likewise, believers have the Holy Spirit with all of His power, yet many Christians live as if they were spiritually bankrupt.

Should you seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit? No! If you have trusted Christ, you already have the Holy Spirit, His baptism, and His power. You now need to use the power that you have.