

## **Question: What is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?**

**Answer:** Seven New Testament passages speak of baptism of/in/with/by the Holy Spirit. The varying prepositions reflect the fact that the Spirit is both the agent and sphere of this baptism. Six of these passages refer to John the Baptist's teaching, contrasting his baptism in water with Jesus' future baptism in the Holy Spirit. The seventh is 1 Corinthians 12:13 which refers to the initiation of all the Corinthian Christians into the church.

In Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16, John predicts that the Messiah who will come after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This prophetic expression refers to the Holy Spirit's work, which purifies believers and condemns unbelievers. This will occur on the day of Pentecost and will culminate at the final judgment. Mark 1:8 and John 1:33 are parallel passages, but mention only the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 1:5, as Jesus prepares to ascend into heaven, He refers back to John's words and predicts their fulfillment within "a few days." In just a little over a week, the disciples celebrate Pentecost and receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32 (cf. Acts 2:17–21). Again in Acts 11:16, Peter refers to John's baptism. In neither place are we told that the baptism of the Spirit is something we should seek, after salvation.

It is clear that all six of these references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit have Pentecost-like experiences primarily in view. However, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul writes, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." The words translated "we were all baptized" speak of an action that took place in one instant of time. The baptism of the Spirit takes place at the moment of salvation, is not repeated, and is not to be sought after salvation. The baptism of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is the placing of the believer into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation. It is descriptive of our initiation into the body of Christ (i.e., the universal church).

Please note that there is no mention of a two-stage experience. Paul states that the entire church had been baptized in the Spirit, including the large number of "carnal" Christians Paul elsewhere rebukes (1 Cor 3:1–4). This clearly indicates that Spirit-baptism cannot guarantee a certain level of Christian maturity or holiness. And if no one spiritual gift was held by all Corinthian believers (1 Cor 12:29–30), then neither may Spirit-baptism be uniformly equated with the gift of tongues.

The 1 Corinthians passage should be our defining text. The reason for this is that we, like the Corinthians, are a part of the church age. The other six instances of the baptism of the Holy Spirit are transitional in nature. By that we mean the disciples were transitioning from the old covenant into the new covenant. Therefore, we must be careful NOT to develop our doctrine from transitional accounts. For example, we must ask the question: Is the book of Acts descriptive or prescriptive? We opt for the former. Luke is recounting the story of the early church. Not everything in this account should be directly transferred to every local church. However, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during the church age and the church at Corinth was a local church like many churches today.

It is important to note that Pentecost was not the disciples' first experience of the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; 20:22), but that does not demand the generalization that the "baptism of the Spirit" is a "second blessing" (i.e. a deeper experience of the Spirit subsequent to conversion). Pentecost was a second blessing for the disciples because they were followers of Jesus, both before and after His death. But there is no indication that Cornelius and his friends underwent any second experience of the Spirit. Their Spirit-baptism was simultaneous with their conversion to Christ (Acts 10:44–48). This is the experience of the believer today.

Yet, there are three transitional cases recorded in the book of Acts that must be considered. They took place with three different groups: the Samaritan believers, whose religion and ancestry were part Jewish (Acts 8:14-25); the Gentile family of Cornelius (10:44-48); and twelve people who had believed in Christ and received John's baptism but knew nothing about what had happened at Pentecost (19:1-7).

In the case of the Samaritans, though they had been baptized in water (Acts 8:12), the gift of the Holy Spirit was delayed until Peter and John came and laid their hands on them. Normally the Spirit is given at the moment of faith (see Acts 10:44; 19:2; Eph. 1:13). Yet, in this instance, it was imperative that the Samaritans be identified with the apostles and the Jerusalem church so that there would be no rival Samaritan Christian church because of the long-standing rivalry that had existed between the Jews and the Samaritans. Without this delay and the coming of the apostles there would have been an immediate rift or division in the early church. The delay of the baptism of the Spirit (which joins us into union with Christ making us one people [1 Cor 12:12-13]), until the coming of the apostles, clearly demonstrated their oneness (see Eph 4:1f).

We must recognize that these signs were given during the transition from the Jewish beginnings of the church to the full inclusion of the Gentiles. When the transition was over, visible signs no longer accompanied the baptism of the Holy Spirit. By giving visible signs in these three instances, the Holy Spirit confirmed the fact that Jesus Christ was building His church. When a person trusts Christ today, he is placed into the church, the body of Christ, at the moment of salvation.

Is this to say that after conversion, there is no extra measure of the Spirit's power in the life of a believer? Absolutely not! Luke employs the expression, "the filling of the Holy Spirit," to refer to occasions when bold proclamation of the Gospel quickly follows (e.g., Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 13:9). The filling of the Holy Spirit is the only conditional benefit of the Holy Spirit (see Eph 5:18). The Spirit's work of indwelling, sealing, and baptizing all take place at conversion. But "filling" is an ongoing power that God provides. However, to be continually filled demands that we abide in Christ, confess our sin, and pray that the Lord would empower us!

Summary: The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is that act whereby God brings the believer into the body of Christ. It occurs the moment a person believes in Jesus Christ. It is also unique to the church age. Passages like John 7:37f; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13-14; and Colossians 2:11-13, demonstrate that the giving of the Spirit is based upon personal faith in Christ. If we want to use biblical terminology accurately, then we must differentiate between the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit.