

THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

by R H Johnston

Background

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit was prophesied in Joel 2:28-29. God's Holy Spirit was to be poured out on all God's people, whether young or old, men or women, on **ordinary** people of no account. Ordinary people were to act as prophets, fulfilling Moses's desire that all God's people should be prophets (Num 11:29). This was radically new when it happened at Pentecost. In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was not given to all, but was only poured upon a few of God's people to empower them for special work (e.g. Exodus 31:3; Judges 6:34; 1 Samuel 10:10; 1 Samuel 16:13; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 2 Peter 1:21).

John the Baptist announced that the coming Messiah would be the "Baptiser in the Holy Spirit and fire". He contrasted this with his own work, which was baptising people in water for repentance with a view to the forgiveness of sins. See Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5 and Acts 2:38 together with the relevant contexts.

The Lord Jesus Christ's Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Jesus had the indwelling Spirit all His life on Earth

The Lord Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), and that Spirit continued to live within Him. To be alive at all, Jesus Christ's Spirit had to be within Him, because "without the spirit the body is dead" (James 2:26). As the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ as well as the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9), the Holy Spirit must have indwelt Christ throughout His life on Earth.

Jesus not noticed for thirty years!

From His birth to His baptism, Jesus did nothing which marked Him out as special. It seems amazing that God could live on earth for thirty years and not be noticed. He did no miracles. The only signs of His true nature were His unusual understanding (Luke 2:47) and His favourable testimony with God and men (Luke 2:52). The reaction of the hearers to the sermon He preached after His baptism shows that He had never spoken in an unusual way even in the synagogue (Luke 4:22). What made the difference was His baptism by John and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him, followed by the testing in the wilderness.

Jesus's "repentance" and baptism by John

Jesus submitted to John's water baptism because it was the right thing to do (Matthew 3:15). John protested (Matthew 3:14), because he knew that Jesus was without sin. Jesus's obedience reveals two things:

1. It illustrates Matthew 3:8: He was already bearing good fruit and His baptism was the seal of His right attitude towards God the Father.
2. It marked the end of Jesus's previous life. He would no longer live at home as head of the household, following an ordinary occupation. Just as He was later to command those who followed Him, He Himself left all His possessions, family and His own life with its own business (Luke 9:57-62).

Jesus had always done the will of God and pleased Him (Luke 2:52). Now His life was to be fully and completely given over to God's direct service. He had been a carpenter (Mark 6:3), fulfilling people's demands for carpentry. Repentance meant this life was over. Repentance is seen here at its most sublime: the Son of God makes His own "change of mind" concerning the direction of His life. Water baptism is death to the old life (Romans 6). As Jesus came up out of the water to the new life, the Holy Spirit came down as a dove towards (Greek "eis") Him (Mark 1:10) and rested upon (Greek "epi") Him (Matthew 3:16; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). A voice from heaven said: "This is my Beloved Son, with whom I was well pleased" (Matthew 3:17, literal translation). This "was" confirmed Jesus's prior purity, as did the dove form (Matthew 10:16). A dove will not land on anything unclean.

Jesus tested in the wilderness

Jesus was now full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), and this Spirit led Him into the wilderness where He was tested by the devil. These tests were to prove that His holiness would not fail under the pressure of His ministry. Paul may also have experienced special testing (Galatians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 11:21-12:10). All Christians undergo testing for the refining of their faith (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6-7), some more severely than others (Hebrews 12:3-11).

The nature of the testing Jesus endured was unusual. None of these tests would tempt an ordinary sane person. Ordinary people do not have the power to turn stones into bread. A fall from a tall building means certain death. The power of the world's armies makes an offer of the kingdoms of this world a lunatic delusion. But for the Spiritual Man, Jesus, such tests were real: they tested His holiness (that is, His consecration or separation to God). *(The unusual nature of Jesus's temptations sheds light on Hebrews 4:15. The only recorded temptations of Jesus are those we are considering here (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13), the time when Peter sought to save Him from the cross (Matthew 16:21-23), and in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-45). Satan never bothered to tempt Jesus with ordinary temptations such as covetousness, theft, murder and adultery, which*

arise from the desires of the corrupt fallen nature (James 1:14), a nature He did not possess. This suggests that Hebrews 4:15 is concerned mainly with the special temptations faced by the spiritual person. Christians have been raised, in Christ, to a life where they are tempted by the same issues that He was. Jesus shows how to overcome such temptations.)

Following the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him, Jesus now had the power to turn stones into bread. The Devil tempted Him to use this new power to satisfy His own (legitimate) bodily needs, and so prove to Himself that He was indeed the Son of God. Jesus rejects the temptation by quoting scripture: it is sufficient to rely on what God has said. And God had said Jesus was His beloved Son in Matthew 3:17.

Similarly, He knew He could be saved from death if He jumped from a Temple pinnacle. The temptation was to prove to others that He was the Son of God by fulfilling Malachi 3:1 dramatically, which prophesied that the Messiah would suddenly appear in the Temple. The Devil quoted scripture to justify the temptation, but the "If you are the Son of God" clause reveals the true origin of these ideas. Jesus's reply, again from scripture, is that you shall not "over-tempt" (Greek *ekpeirazo* = "test thoroughly") God (I.e. God should not be tested beyond what He has commanded). If God really has given someone something he has it (John 3:27-30). It is unnecessary to engineer its possession or to prove it to others, but the temptation to do so is strong (Compare Genesis 27 and its regrettable consequences). Trying to obtain what has not given may be unsuccessful (Daniel 11:14), and even success will not be a blessing (Numbers 11:31-34; Psalm 106:15).

The objective of Jesus's ministry was to bring the peoples of the kingdoms of this world under His own authority and present them back to the Father (Ephesians 1:9-10,20-23). The final temptation, in Matthew's account (Matthew 4:1-11), was to take a short cut to achieve this, avoiding the suffering of the cross with all that involved. When the devil cannot win any other way he tries to ensnare with the ultimate compromise - worship of himself.

Jesus ministry fulfilled through the power of the Holy Spirit

By overcoming in these tests Jesus received the spiritual power He needed to fulfil His ministry (Luke 4:14). Ever after, everyone noticed Jesus wherever He went. His ministry was characterised by authority both in works and word. Jesus fulfilled His earthly ministry, not in His power as Son of God - all that glory had been laid aside (Philippians 2:6-8) - but through the power of the Holy Spirit upon Him. Jesus's life on earth is the perfect example of a man operating through the power of the Holy Spirit, doing not his own will, but the will of the Father (John 5:19,30).

The Twelve and the Holy Spirit

Holy Spirit alongside the disciples during Jesus's ministry

Concerning the Twelve, John 14:17 says that they knew the Spirit of Truth for "he dwells with (Greek "para"= alongside) you and will be in (Greek "en") you". Jesus likens the Spirit to Himself (John 14:16), saying that the Spirit will be another Counsellor (Greek "paraklytos" = legal advocate, one called alongside to assist) of the same kind.

Being of the same kind, the Spirit of Truth (or genuineness) does the same works as Jesus Himself. The power of the Holy Spirit **alongside** them in Jesus had already enabled the disciples to preach and work signs (Luke 9:6). In spite of their experience, at the Last Supper the disciples did not yet possess the **indwelling** Spirit. The characters of the disciples were still unreformed: the Sons of Thunder had wanted to call down fire from heaven (Luke 9:54) and Peter was shortly going to deny the Lord (Matthew 26:69-75). *(There are people without the indwelling Spirit today who, through being alongside Spirit-filled Christians, perform signs and wonders in Jesus's name (Matthew 7:21-23). They will not be accepted by the Lord because they do not possess the indwelling Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9).)*

Twelve receive the indwelling Spirit on the Day of the Resurrection

John 14:17 was fulfilled on the day of the Resurrection (John 20:19-23). John 20:22 is best translated: "And when He had said this, He breathed into them and said to them: `Receive the Holy Spirit'." The force of the Greek is that He breathed the Holy Spirit into the disciples and they received the Holy Spirit there and then. It was not a promise of future receiving, but a command to receive at that moment. The word "breathed into" (Greek "enephusysen") appears nowhere else in the New Testament. But it does appear a few times in the Septuagint, an ancient translation of the Old Testament into Greek. In Genesis 2:7, the Father breathed into Adam and he became a living being. In Ezekiel 37:9 the Spirit breathed on the dry bones to make them alive. Here in John 20, Jesus, God's Son, the remaining member of the Godhead, breathes into the disciples to make them spiritually alive, and possessors of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Now the disciples were "born from above" (John 3:3), and united with each other and with Jesus, so fulfilling the desire of Jesus's prayer in John 17. Peter confirms that this happened on the day of Resurrection in 1 Peter 1:3, by pointing back to the Resurrection, not Pentecost, as the basis of new birth and divine life.

With the Holy Spirit came peace (John 20:19), a commission (John 20:21), and prophetic authority (John 20:23). *(John 20:23 has been much misunderstood. It refers to the authority given to the carriers of the gospel message, by preaching*

that message under divine authority. It is not the power to declare forgiven what has not been forgiven in heaven.)

The Twelve have new life but must wait for power

John's account, in line with his general emphasis on eternal life, tells us about Jesus breathing divine life into the disciples. Luke (Luke 24:36-49) emphasises other aspects of the same meeting of Jesus with His disciples on the evening of the day of the Resurrection. Luke 24:49 says that Jesus will send the promise of the Father upon (Greek "epi") them, but they are to wait in the city until they are clothed with power from on high. Jesus had breathed the divine life of the indwelling Spirit into them, but they had to wait for the promised power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them and clothe them.

Why the disciples had to wait for the Spirit in power

Only after Jesus had ascended to heaven, and they had seen Him go and not return (Acts 1:9), could the Spirit which had rested upon Him come upon them. This is prefigured in the story of Elijah and Elisha in 2 Kings 2:9-15. The disciples asked about the timing of the coming of the kingdom in Acts 1:6 of which Jesus had spoken in Acts 1:3. Jesus does not give a direct answer. Instead He makes it clear that the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the key to their witness to the coming Messianic Kingdom (Acts 1:8).

What the disciples could do by the indwelling Spirit

The disciples could do and experience many things between the Resurrection and Pentecost, through the indwelling Spirit:

1. They understood the scriptures (Luke 24:45).
2. They were witnesses of what had happened (Luke 24:48). (See 5)).
3. They were "blessed" (Luke 24:51)
4. They experienced great joy (Luke 24:52).
5. They were continually blessing God in the Temple (Luke 24:53). (It seems inevitable that they must have said to God, and to others in the Temple, things that declared what had happened. See 2)).
6. They received commandments (Acts 1:2).
7. They devoted themselves to prayer with one accord (Acts 1:14).
8. They discerned God's will from the scriptures (Acts 1:20).

All these are generally accepted as characteristic of Christians (though many "churches" find it hard to do even these things). But all were possible before the experience of Pentecost.

What the disciples still lacked

What was still lacking from the disciples experience?:

1. The promise of the Father upon (Greek "epi") (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4).
2. The clothing with power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).
3. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4).
4. The ability to be witnesses "unto me" (Acts 1:8). *(Contrast this with 2) in the previous list. Acts 1:1 speaks of what Jesus began to do and teach. Being a witness unto Jesus is being able to continue the same sort of doing and teaching which Jesus had begun, by performing works by the power of the Holy Spirit which are then explained (e.g. Acts 2:1-40; Acts 3:1-26).)*

The powerless parallel with Jesus before His baptism

Clearly the disciples lacked exactly the same things which Jesus lacked before His baptism. They could live holy lives in communion with God, but made no impact on the people around them.

The disciples are baptised in the Holy Spirit

The day God had appointed finally arrived (Acts 2:1ff). Pentecost was different from the other feasts in that the bread (a symbol of humanity) that was offered was leavened (symbolic of corruption) (Leviticus 23:17). So it was appropriate that the Holy Spirit should fall upon fallen humanity on that day. The disciples had prepared themselves through active waiting, reading of scripture and devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14). The Holy Spirit came upon them, not as a dove as He had upon Jesus, but as a wind and fire. This was because, unlike Jesus, they needed purifying as well as empowering, that they might be godly, loving, fruitful and disciplined (compare 2 Timothy 1:7). They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4).

The characteristics of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The characteristic feature of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is the "resting or falling upon" of the Spirit (Acts 2:3; Acts 8:16; Acts 10:44; Acts 11:15; Luke 3:22) and being endued with power to be a witness unto Jesus (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

Neither being "filled with the Holy Spirit" nor "speaking in tongues" is the characteristic feature of the "Baptism in the Holy Spirit". The expression "filled with the Holy Spirit" is used consistently in connection with the exercise of a spiritual gift, even before Pentecost (Luke 1:41,67). Being "filled with the Holy Spirit" indicates a special enduement for a specific task (Acts 4:8,31): in this case the gift exercised was tongues (Acts 2:4).

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit makes Christianity public

As soon as they had been baptised in the Holy Spirit, their doings became a matter of public concern. They were meeting in a house (Acts 2:2) but it was impossible for the meeting to stay private once the Holy Spirit had come upon them. Where the Holy Spirit comes in this way people take notice. They heard the disciples speaking in their own dialect (Acts 2:6). The significance of this is that they heard them speak it perfectly, just as they learned it at their mother's knee. There was no "foreign" accent in what was said. This was amazing.

The sign of the end of the era of Babel

The deeper significance was that the era of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1- 9), with its confusion of understanding, comes to an end where people are controlled by God's Spirit. God was showing that it is now possible to understand Him and His mighty works correctly. God now reveals Himself to us by His Holy Spirit, using the words and thought patterns we most naturally and accurately understand. Access to God is no longer obscured, and obtained only through priestly intermediaries.

Pentecost also marked the end of humanly organised activity (Genesis 11:6). God had tamed the tongue to make it fulfil His will, and in so doing He brought every action of these Christians under divine control (James 1:26; James 3:1-12).

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is characteristic of the church age

Peter explained the significance of these events (Acts 2:14-36), quoting Old Testament prophecies, especially Joel 2. Joel 2:28-32 is distinct from what precedes and follows it, and forms a separate chapter in the Hebrew bible. Its unity reveals that the age of the universally available Holy Spirit for empowered ministry is linked to the close of the age and the Day of the Lord. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is available throughout the church age, since it is part of the fulfilment of Joel 2:30-32. Peter also bore witness to what had been done to Jesus by the Jews, and to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. He explained that the Holy Spirit had been poured out in fulfilment of prophecy. Finally he lays the blame squarely on his hearers for their crucifixion of the One whom God had made both Lord and Christ. At this they were cut to the heart (Acts 2:37) and asked what they should do.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Church

Peter's reply in Acts 2:38-39 shows that the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is available to the whole church. All these people were on the wrong side of God's wrath, even though many of them may not have been directly involved in Christ's

trial and crucifixion. Firstly they had to repent - or, as we might say, change their attitude - towards Jesus Christ. Secondly they had to submit to baptism on (Greek "epi") the name of (i.e. on the authority of) Jesus Christ, in water (compare Acts 10:47-48). Repentance and baptism brought an end to the old way of living, as noted already in connection with Jesus's baptism.

Spirit Baptism normally conditional on Repentance and Baptism in water

Repentance followed by baptism in water is what God has revealed as His normal requirements for entering into the forgiveness of sins and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. They are normally essential. Those who wilfully refuse to go through this gate are unlikely to receive the assurance of forgiveness and the power of the Spirit. Anyone who does receive the gift of the Holy Spirit as a divine act of mercy prior to water baptism should not think water baptism unimportant. Rather they should believe it all the more necessary to be baptised without delay (Acts 10:47-48).

Spirit Baptism available to all, without exception of race or time

The promise of Acts 2:38 was made not only to those present (who were Jews and proselytes) but also to their descendants and to all that are far off (i.e. Gentiles, Ephesians 2:17), **everyone** whom the Lord our God calls to Him (Acts 2:39). The promise is to all, without exception of race or time. What is the promise? This word occurs at Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; Acts 2:33; Acts 2:39. It also occurs at Galatians 3:14 (see Galatians 3:2-5). In each case it is in the context of the power of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The power that the apostles and the whole of the early church received is available to us. They had nothing which cannot be received today. Men can still save themselves from this crooked generation (i.e. their inborn tendency to practise evil) (Acts 2:40) through repentance and water baptism. In response to this obedience God continues to grant the gifts of forgiveness of sin and the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Baptism in the Spirit: empowered witness but not "unbalanced"

The 3000 baptised that day expanded the ministry of the church: ordinary people feared (Acts 2:43) but thought well of them (Acts 2:47). There was nothing "unbalanced" or peculiar about the early church. The atmosphere of these early chapters of Acts is one of power, and of a powerful and fearless testimony to Jesus Himself, as both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). They no longer merely said what Jesus had done in His earthly ministry. They were now declaring who He is, and continuing the same ministry, preaching and doing the divine works which He had done. As they had seen Him work, so they worked (compare John 5:19). This was a major advance over what the church did before Pentecost.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit: an objective, verifiable experience

Evidence from the Samaritan "Pentecost" (Acts 8)

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a definite, objective and externally verifiable experience. This is revealed by the events in Acts 8 and Acts 19:1-7. In Acts 8, Philip had gone to the Samaritans and preached Christ to them and performed signs (Acts 8:5-7,13). There was much joy and many were baptised (Acts 8:8,12,13). But Christians who saw them knew that the Holy Spirit had not fallen upon (Greek "epi") them. They had been baptised into (Greek "eis") the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16) and hence must have received the indwelling Spirit (compare Romans 8:9) but not the baptism in the Holy Spirit. They were still in the condition of the disciples prior to Pentecost. When the apostles came and laid hands on them (Acts 8:17) something objective and definite occurred (compare Acts 2:4; Acts 10:44; Acts 19:6) which Simon wanted to be able to give himself. Simon had already seen a great deal (Acts 8:6,7,13), but this was different and special, and obvious to all when they saw it, even if their own attitudes were wrong. (See also Acts 2:12-13).

The signs that someone has been baptised in the Holy Spirit are clear to everyone. This had been true at Pentecost. Some believe that the sign is "speaking in tongues". While this may be part of it, it seems improbable that Simon would have wanted to pay money to supply this gift alone. The objective evidence is that the person receives the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49) and becomes a powerful witness unto Jesus in both words and works. Simon's attitude shows that it is attractive to the ambitious to be able to exercise this kind of power. There are those who have his spirit today, and they need to be dealt with as Peter did, calling Simon to repentance.

Evidence from the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19)

Acts 19:1-7 tells of some disciples at Ephesus who received the baptism in the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. When Paul met them, they were disciples, but Paul was aware that they were deficient in their experience of the Holy Spirit. Paul's question in Acts 19:2 shows that anyone who has received the baptism in the Holy Spirit as described in Acts 19:6 knows that they experienced an objective event at a definite time. It also shows that this should occur when they first believe. It also shows that a spiritual person can tell whether someone else has been baptised in the Holy Spirit by observing the power manifested in his life (compare 1 Corinthians 4:20). John's baptism of repentance was not sufficient to give new life. John was only able to tell people to believe in the One to come (Acts 19:4). These disciples therefore had to be baptised into (Greek "eis") the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5) and thus into His death and

resurrection. When they were baptised in the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6) they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not optional

Acts 8 and Acts 19 show that where people have not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is essential to remedy this defect (Titus 1:5). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not an optional extra which a Christian may refuse if he is not so inclined. The obligation to see the new converts baptised in the Holy Spirit lay with the apostles, not with the converts to seek it.

Divine Sovereignty in the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Only Jesus baptises in the Holy Spirit

God is sovereign in His baptising in the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist had revealed Jesus as the One who would baptise in the Holy Spirit (John 1:32- 34), and it is only Jesus who can do this. Thus Peter and John did not act presumptuously: they prayed for the converts in Acts 8:15, prior to receiving authority to lay hands on them.

God over-rules human prejudice (Acts 10)

Divine sovereignty is also seen in Acts 10:44. Peter was preaching to the Gentiles, rather unwillingly it would seem, and God baptised in the Holy Spirit those who heard the word. At this stage the church was still mostly Jewish and becoming increasingly legalistic. God knew that the only way such a church would welcome Gentiles into fellowship was if He intervened to give the Gentiles the same experience as the Jews who had become Christians (Acts 10:47). There was no difference between the baptism in the Holy Spirit received by the Twelve Apostles and that received by these ordinary Gentile believers. They were then baptised in water. God reversed the normal order because He wanted to bless people that the church felt ought not to be blessed. But the missing steps had to be filled in straight-away: they could not be dispensed with.

Persecution of those who obey God

Later Peter faced an inquisition from the legalists who had gained entry into the church (Acts 11:2-18). Persecution is a normal experience for those who do as God requires (2 Timothy 3:12). Such persecution comes mainly from those within the church organisation who are still old covenant people in attitude.

Summary

The indwelling Spirit gives new life in Christ, and enables a person to live a holy life in communion with God. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a separate objective verifiable experience. The baptism in the Spirit provides spiritual power for service and for bearing witness to the Lord Jesus not merely in words but also by doing the same works that Jesus did. It is not an optional extra, but essential to fulfil the work of God.

There are other aspects of the Holy Spirit's work not covered or touched upon in this paper. An analytical concordance can be used to locate the references to His other activities.

These notes provide a basic treatment of the subject to stimulate personal bible study. Every effort has been made to be accurate, but the reader should test everything in accord with the example of Acts 17:11 and the command of 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Errors, or queries which are unresolved after consulting the LORD, should be referred to the author (email: rhjbibpap@rhj.org.uk).

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