

How Should We Answer This Question:

"HAVE YOU RECEIVED THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY GHOST?"

by Thomas Williamson

Sometimes a Christian will be asked whether he or she has been baptized with the Holy Ghost, or whether his church has the baptism with the Holy Ghost. How should we answer this question?

Many theories have been proposed as to the nature of the baptism with the Holy Ghost. Rather than reviewing these, we would do well to examine the Bible references to this immersion in the Holy Spirit. (The Greek word for baptism always refers to immersion, sometimes literally in water or dye, and sometimes immersion in a figurative sense. No other meaning of the word can be found in the New Testament or in ancient Greek literature.)

The baptism with the Holy Ghost was prophesied by John the Baptist as a future event in Matthew 3:11, where it is associated with fire: *"He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire."* This prophecy appears also in the parallel passages describing John's ministry. In Mark 1:8 we read. *"I indeed have baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost."* Luke 3:16 tells us, *"I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."* John 1:33 identifies Christ as the One who would have authority to baptize with the Holy Ghost: *"He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."*

There are no further references in the Gospels to the baptism with the Holy Ghost. The next reference, in Acts 1:5, leaves us with no doubt as to when this promised event would take place. Christ, just before His Ascension, told His Apostles: "*For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*" What noteworthy event took place only a few days after the Ascension, 10 days to be exact? Pentecost!

Now that we have pinpointed the time when the promised baptism with the Holy Ghost took place, we can examine the nature of that event. As John the Baptist had foretold, it was associated with fire; not a literal fire, but visible cloven tongues as of fire, Acts 2:3. There was a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind, Acts 2:2. The disciples spoke in tongues, Acts 2:4. These were not unknown, heavenly languages incomprehensible to men; rather, they were actual foreign languages, clearly understood by those who were in the audience, Acts 2:8-11.

Should this great event of Pentecost be duplicated by churches today? There is no record in the Bible or in church history of a reenactment of Pentecost, nor any command from God that we should re-enact this event. Any church claiming to re-enact Pentecost should check to see if all these signs are duplicated: the sound of a rushing mighty wind; the visible cloven tongues as of fire; and the proclamation of the Gospel in actual foreign languages not understood by those who speak.

Not only has Pentecost never been re-enacted, but it is a one-time historical event which by its very nature requires no re-enactment. We do not expect to see the parting of the waters of the Red Sea reenacted by any church today; that was a one-time event which served its purpose of getting the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. We need to learn the lessons of this

miraculous intervention by God in human history, and live by those lessons, but we do not need to replicate the event itself.

What great historical purpose was accomplished by the baptism of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost? The disciples at that time received power for their Christian ministry, Acts 1:8, but the Holy Spirit still empowers us for witnessing today without any visible or miraculous manifestations. There was more to the baptism with the Holy Ghost than this. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit appeared visibly to men in order to place His public stamp of approval on a new institution which God had ordained, through which all of His work on earth was to be done: the Church.

There were two earlier institutions which God established with the intention that all the worship and service of God's people should be conducted through them; these were the Tabernacle of Moses and the Temple of Solomon. The Holy Spirit appeared publicly and visibly at the inauguration of the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-35) and the Temple (1 Kings 8:10-11) in order to show to all men that God approved and endorsed these institutions, and one such manifestation of the Holy Spirit was enough in each case. It should not surprise us that the Holy Spirit endorsed the Church in the same public manner in Acts 2.

It should be made clear that the Church which the Holy Spirit endorsed at Pentecost was the institution of the local church, not the so-called "mystical, invisible, Universal Church," an unscriptural concept which is contrary to all that the New Testament teaches on the subject of the Church. The "Universal Church," as conceived by its adherents, is a helpless, useless non-entity which cannot assemble, baptize, celebrate the Lord's Supper, discipline members or receive tithes. The Church at Jerusalem did all of these.

Also, we should avoid the error of believing that Pentecost was "the birthday of the Church" as is glibly stated by some. There is no scriptural basis for that statement. The Church at Jerusalem added 3000 members on the Day of Pentecost, Acts 2:41. You cannot add to something that is not there already. In Acts 1, before Pentecost, we see an organized meeting of the Church in Jerusalem, at which time Matthias was chosen to serve as an apostle. The fact that Jesus gave His disciples instructions for church discipline, Matthew 18:17, advising them to "*tell it to the church*" without having to explain to them what a church was, shows that the Church already existed—it was founded by Christ.

After reviewing the nature and purpose of the baptism with the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, we move on to the next (and last) scriptural reference to the baptism with the Holy Ghost. In Acts 11:16 the Apostle Peter, defending his decision to receive the Gentile converts of Caesarea as brethren and to baptize them, said, "*Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, 'John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.'*"

Whether Peter was stating that the giving of the Holy Ghost to Cornelius and his companions in Acts 10:44-45 was another instance of the baptism with the Holy Ghost, or merely comparing this event to what he experienced at Pentecost, is not made clear here. What is clear is that the Holy Spirit graciously fell upon these Gentile converts, the first in history, in order to publicly demonstrate God's acceptance of Gentiles into the family of God, so that the Hebrew Christians might also accept them. This event, like Pentecost, was a one-time historical event which need not, and cannot, be duplicated by churches today. There can be only one "first time" for anything.

At this point we come to the end of all scriptural references to the baptism with the Holy Ghost; there are no others. Some have identified the

episode of Acts 19:1-7, where Paul rebaptized certain disciples of Ephesus, as an instance of baptism with the Holy Ghost, but we should be cautious about doing so, since that term is not used in the passage. Instead of arguing over what name to apply to this manifestation of Holy Ghost power, we would do well to consider the main lesson of the passage—the importance of proper baptism.

Baptism, to be valid, must meet these four requirements: 1. Proper mode (immersion). 2. Proper subject (a born-again believer, not an unsaved person). 3. Proper purpose (to show our obedience as disciples of Jesus, not to get ourselves saved). 4. Proper administrator (an appointed representative of a New Testament local church, who need not necessarily be an ordained minister).

In some way, the baptism of the Ephesian disciples was deficient. Since they did not even know Who the Holy Spirit was, they probably were not saved when they were baptized. They apparently were baptized by a free-lance Christian not under local church authority, in contrast to Paul who was sent out by the Church at Antioch, Acts 13:1-3. Apollos has been suggested as the culprit.

Whatever the problem was, Paul did not agree to overlook it, but insisted that the problem be corrected. It is sometimes erroneously stated that there were no rebaptizers or Anabaptists prior to the 16th century, but those who say this have forgotten Paul! The Ephesian disciples obediently agreed to be baptized by Paul when they found that their previous baptism was deficient, and the Holy Spirit publicly bestowed His stamp of approval on their act of submission.

(Acts 19:1-7 has been twisted by some to argue that John's baptism is not Christian baptism and is not for this age. This notion is based on the false assumption that the Ephesian disciples, far removed in place and time

from John the Baptist, were actually baptized by him. The passage does not say this at all. Paul had nothing but good to say about John's baptism, Acts 19:4. The fact that Jesus and the Apostles, the founders of Christianity, were all satisfied with John's baptism and never sought a more modern baptism, should be sufficient to prove that John's baptism is for this age.)

We have now examined all references to baptism with the Holy Spirit in the Bible. It should be noted, however, that there are some who interpret 1 Corinthians 12:13 ("*For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body . . .*") as a reference to baptism with the Holy Spirit. Such an interpretation introduces tremendous confusion into an otherwise clear understanding of this subject. The alleged Holy Spirit baptism of 1 Corinthians 12:13, as conceived by those who hold this view, is private, individual, with no fire and no outward manifestations, and occurs at the moment of salvation. How can this concept possibly be reconciled with the baptism with the Holy Ghost of Acts 2, which was public, corporate, with outward manifestations and fire, falling upon already converted believers?

This difficulty is totally eliminated when we realize that the baptism mentioned in I Corinthians 12:13 is water baptism and nothing else. Many commentators do not even believe that the Holy Spirit is mentioned at all in this verse; they regard it as teaching that all those who are members of a local church, or body of Christ, have entered that church through water baptism in oneness of spirit. Others say that the Holy Spirit is in view here, and that it is by the guidance and enablement of the Holy Spirit that we become water-baptized members of a local church. Either interpretation fits well into the context of New Testament teaching; the notion of a Holy Spirit baptism at the moment of conversion does not fit at all. The Holy Spirit enters into all believers at the moment of conversion, so that He indwells all believers (Romans 8:9-16), but we are not told that the Holy Spirit baptizes believers at conversion. According to Ephesians 4:5, there is only one

baptism. This must be water baptism, which the Bible teaches; not "Spirit baptism," which the Bible does not teach.

We can conclude, from our study of all that the New Testament teaches about the baptism with the Holy Ghost, that this was a glorious historical event by which God authenticated His church at the outset of its ministry, after the Ascension of Christ. There is no command for churches today to seek to duplicate this event, or for individuals to seek to be baptized with or by the Holy Ghost, at or after conversion.

Does this mean that we reject the ministry, gifts and fulness of the Holy Spirit in this age? Absolutely not! We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5:18, and we should be open to all gifts that the Holy Spirit wishes to bestow on us in these last days.

Should we reject the teaching of those who present different views concerning the baptism with the Holy Ghost? Not necessarily. Most teaching of this nature has a sound scriptural basis, even if the teachers have applied an imprecise term to the thing they teach. It would be far better to experience all the blessings, gifts and fulness that the Holy Spirit wishes us to have, and apply the wrong name to that experience, than to be sound in our doctrine and nomenclature without experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We should not be critical of those who describe their experience with the Holy Spirit as a "baptism." Nor should advocates of Holy Spirit baptism be critical of those who prefer not to use that terminology.

We are now ready to come to the conclusion of the whole matter, and answer the question posed at the beginning of this article: "*Have you received the baptism with the Holy Ghost?*" May we always respond to such a question with a humble searching of our hearts, that we might be totally yielded to the Holy Spirit and guided by Him in all aspects of our lives.

But for those wishing to know our relationship to the Biblical doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Ghost, they would do well to phrase the question like this: "Are you a member of a local church of the same faith and practice as the Church at Jerusalem, and thus part of the divine institution which God validated and authenticated by the baptism with the Holy Ghost?"

Your answer to that question is yes, if your church has continued in the Apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42) and requires immersion for membership (Acts 2:41). If you are in such a church, you do not need to leave it in search of the baptism with the Holy Ghost. Yield your life completely to the Holy Spirit, so He can use you more fully in the church you are in.

Additional copies of this tract can be obtained for \$5.00 per hundred postpaid from:

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