

Speaking in Tongues: The Initial Evidence of Holy Spirit Baptism

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The gift of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is available to every Christian believer. “For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him” (Acts 2:39 NRSV). Every believer has the privilege, opportunity, and responsibility to pursue the Spirit-filled life.

Holy Spirit baptism signals entrance into the Spirit-filled life. Jesus demonstrated a sense of urgency for His disciples to receive all that the Father had promised. He said, “And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49 NRSV). Further, He said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8a NRSV). This is a spiritual imperative for the people of God.

Spirit Baptism is not a luxury for a few select individuals, nor a spiritual option for the super-spiritual. Spirit Baptism is the will of God for every believer in Christ. Just as Jesus was led and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfill His mission, believers in every generation need the same equipping of the Holy Spirit. Disciples of Jesus are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Jesus’ witnesses (Acts 1:8). These Spirit-filled believers are being constantly shaped and molded into being Christlike in attitude and behavior. Spirit-filled believers are not victimized by the world-order, a hostile environment, or even sin’s allurements. The Spirit who creates those credible witnesses provides courage, boldness, and wisdom to proclaim the gospel of Christ. The Holy Spirit guides into all truth (John 16:13); teaches (John 14:26); and makes intercession through the Spirit-filled believer (Romans 8:26). He is empowering the people of God to be all they need to be and to do all they need to do. This charismatic endowment (Spirit Baptism) empowers the people of God to accomplish the Great Commandment (loving God supremely: Mark 12:29,30) and the Great Commission (making disciples, Matthew 28:18-20).

The emphasis on Spirit baptism was continued throughout the Book of Acts. Paul’s question to the disciples at Ephesus captures this emphasis and sense of urgency; “Did you receive the Holy Spirit after you believed?”; “Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?”; or “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). The question reveals several things. Paul accepted the fact that as “disciples” they were believers in Christ. He knew that in

regeneration they would have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Paul stated, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Romans 8:9b). All believers are *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit, but not all believers are *filled* with the Holy Spirit. Paul also knew, however, of the possibility that they had not been *baptized* in the Spirit. His question relates to receiving the charismatic endowment of the Holy Spirit that is needed for effective witness. Paul would not have asked the question if it had been unimportant or unanswerable. He expected them to know and to be able to answer “Yes” or “No.” He did not expect, “We hope so,” or “We think so.”

Holy Spirit baptism is a spiritual imperative and the Scriptures show a sense of urgency concerning the baptism. How then can we have an assurance that we have received Spirit baptism and have entered the Spirit-filled life? The answer does not come from our own experience, others’ experiences, or our own faith tradition. The answer comes as Scriptures guide our spiritual journey.

The Book of Acts is a “theological history.” Luke presented events in the history of the Early Church that convey theological principles in the Early Church. The Holy Spirit guided Luke to show the mission of Jesus Christ continuing in Christ’s followers in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Luke reveals that Jesus fulfilled His mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Luke ends and the Book of Acts begins with Jesus’ command that His disciples receive Holy Spirit fullness. The Holy Spirit guides Luke to recite specific instances of Holy Spirit baptism and some of the results of those fillings.

Let us prayerfully consider the contexts and content of Holy Spirit baptisms in the Book of Acts. Luke uses different terms to describe this experience—baptized, filled, receive, come upon, poured out, promises, and gift. According to Acts chapters one and two, the persons gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem were disciples of Jesus Christ who were obeying His command to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the “promise” of the Father. They had received the Word of God, had been separated unto God and unto Christ and from the world-system (John 17.) As they were worshiping God, there was a sound from heaven as a rush of a mighty wind. Divided tongues as of fire appeared among them and rested on each one of them. These phenomena would remind them of Old Testament theophanies in which wind and fire indicated the presence of deity. The disciples were then all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them what to say. People who heard their speaking were bewildered and amazed. Some of the crowd showed a spiritual interest with their question,

“What does this mean?” Others in the crowd sneered and said, “They are filled with a new kind of wine.” The Holy Spirit guides Peter’s understanding and response. He said that Joel’s prophecy was being fulfilled as recorded in Joel 2:28-29. He did not quote Jeremiah nor Ezekiel about a new heart and a new spirit but Joel who prophesied about the outpouring of the Spirit. Joel’s prophecy indicates that after lamenting, repenting, and restoring, the outpouring comes. The promise is being fulfilled and the pattern is being set. Believers in Jesus Christ, obedient to Christ’s command are worshiping with expectation and total submission. This submission includes speaking what the Holy Spirit gives—words different from their own language.

Acts 8 records the events in Samaria when Phillip the Spirit-filled evangelist proclaimed the gospel of Christ. There was wide-spread acceptance of the message. The people believed and were baptized to show their commitment to Jesus Christ. Many signs, wonders, and miracles were experienced in Samaria. Simon who practiced magic also believed and was baptized. He continued with Phillip and was constantly amazed at the signs and miracles.

The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to pray for the believers to receive the Holy Spirit because He had not fallen upon any of them (Acts 8:16). They laid hands on the believers and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-19). When Simon experienced what happened, he lapsed into his profit-seeking mentality and offered money to the apostles to have power to lay hands on people and they receive the Holy Spirit. Simon who had witnessed signs, wonders, and miracles through the ministry of Philip, now saw and/or heard something extraordinary. Many scholars, even non-Pentecostals, conclude that “speaking in tongues” was the evidence observed. F.F. Bruce said, “The context leaves us in no doubt that their reception of the Spirit was attended by external manifestations such as had marked His descent on the earliest disciples at Pentecost.”¹

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson said, “This participle (second aorist active of *horao*) shows plainly that these who received the gift of the Holy Spirit spoke with tongues.”²

Johannes Munck said, “Simon, who by virtue of his earlier life closely observed all wondrous faculties and powers, was struck by the apostles’ ability to make the baptized prophesy and to speak in tongues by the laying on of hands.”³

On the road to Damascus according to Acts 9, Saul of Tarsus became convinced that Jesus is Deity. He committed himself to Jesus and obeyed His instructions. In convincing Ananias of his mission, God said that Saul is praying, that he is God’s chosen instrument and he has been given

a vision. Ananias greeted Saul as “Brother Saul” and said that the Lord Jesus had sent him so that Saul may receive sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures do not say that Saul spoke in tongues, but later he said, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you” 1 Cor. 14:18.

In light of Paul’s statement to the Corinthian church, “I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all” (1 Corinthians 14:18, *NASB*), speaking in tongues must have been a part of his experience in Damascus. Luke’s primary concern was with God’s calling and empowering of Saul for his apostolic ministry. So, Paul’s experience was consistent with the purpose of the outpouring of the Spirit on disciples at Pentecost and at Samaria. They too were equipped to bear the name of their Lord.⁴

Acts 10 records the filling of the Spirit at Cornelius’ house. Cornelius was a devout man, a generous man, a praying man, and one to whom God communicated instructions. He obeyed God and sent for Simon Peter.

As Peter was preaching, he said, “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ – His is Lord of all – that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached.” (Acts 10:36, 37). “A strong case can be made that Cornelius and company were members of the people of God as defined by Luke.”⁵

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon all who were hearing his message. The six Spirit-filled men who had accompanied Peter were astonished and knew that these had been baptized in the Holy Spirit because they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God (Acts 10:44-46).

Peter went to Jerusalem and gave his report of what God did with the believers at Cornelius’ house. He said, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, “John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 11:15-16). “That tongues are the normative evidence of the baptism of the Spirit is unmistakably clear in this place.”⁶

Paul’s concern that every believer be Spirit-filled was shown in his question to the disciples. The question “Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?” was referenced earlier in this paper. The disciples to whom the question was asked had become believers through the ministry of John the baptizer. John preached the baptism of repentance and announced and

introduced Jesus Christ. John also said, “I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8). Through the ministry of John these were believers in Jesus Christ, but they did not know of the spiritual dimension of the operation of the Holy Spirit that was available. Paul explained the way more fully showing the connection of John and Jesus. They were then baptized in the authority of Jesus Christ. Acts 19:6 states, “When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.” No further questions were asked. Speaking in tongues was the sign that these had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

From studying the Book of Acts, it is undeniable that the one repeated pattern, initial evidence, or first sign that Spirit baptism has occurred is speaking in tongues as the Holy Spirit gives the utterance. This is the reason that speaking in tongues is viewed as normative evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This pattern was not culturally engineered nor personally manipulated but divinely set. Some would say, “We cannot put God in a box,” but if God chooses to give assurance to believers that they have entered into the Spirit-filled life by their speaking in other tongues, who are human beings to attempt to withstand God? The prevalence of and encouragement of speaking in tongues according to 1 Corinthians 14 give evidence that the believers in the Early Church put emphasis on the Spirit-filled life. While Paul gave guidelines concerning prophecy, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues in corporate worship, he also extolled the blessings of speaking in tongues, in individual worship of God. The person is speaking to God, articulates praises to God, and is being built up spiritually in the process. Paul encourages all to speak in tongues and emphasizes the importance of interpretation of tongues in corporate worship. So, speaking in tongues signals the entrance into the Spirit-filled life and continues in individual worship thereafter.

An atmosphere of trust and expectation in the community of believers helps believers to submit fully to the work of God in their lives, even to allowing the Holy Spirit to guide what they say. Cornelius told Peter, “Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us” (Acts 10:33). In that atmosphere, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message” (Acts 10:44).

May God guide each of us to seek Him and to accept all His provisions!

For further study please consult: Lombard, John A. Jr. and Jerald J. Daffe. *Speaking in Tongues—Initial Evidence of Spirit Baptism* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press), 2005.

ENDNOTES

¹F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 181.

²A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932) 107.

³Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible, eds. William Albright and David Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) 75.

⁴French Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) 100.

⁵Donald A. Johns, "Some New Directions in the Hermeneutics of Classical Pentecostalism's Doctrine of Initial Evidence," in *Initial Evidence*, Gary B. McGee, ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991) 151.

⁶Howard M. Ervin, *Spirit Baptism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987) 78,79.

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