

## Th123 A Study of the Holy Spirit

### *Th123-16 What Is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit?*

As the Book of Acts begins, Jesus left His disciples with a parting command. “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.... For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5). He then gave them a final promise: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Lastly, “He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”

Jesus thus commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had been empowered by the Holy Spirit. In this and the next four lessons, we will explain the pathway into the Spirit-empowered life. It is an experience that Jesus, John the Baptist, and Peter all referred to as the ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit.’

What then is this ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ the New Testament talks about? Before we discuss what the experience *is*, let’s look briefly at what it *is not*. We do this because some hold sincere, but mistaken, ideas concerning the experience.

First, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not salvation. We know this because Jesus’ disciples were already saved when Jesus commanded them to stay in Jerusalem to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not “entire sanctification.” We know this because Jesus had already cleansed His disciples before the Day of Pentecost (John 15:3). Finally, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not a “second blessing” that Christ gives to His followers. It is rather a divine empowering that He gives them to enable them to effectively participate in His mission to redeem the nations. Let’s discuss this idea a bit further.

Scripture describes Spirit baptism in at least three important ways. First, Scripture describes Spirit baptism as a powerful *life-transforming experience from God*. Jesus once described the experience as being clothed with “power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The transforming effect of Spirit baptism is demonstrated in the story of Peter. Before Pentecost, he was timid and fearful, denying that he knew Jesus. However, after he was baptized in the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, he became a bold witness for Christ. He was transformed from the inside out. The same is true today. When someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit, his or her life is dramatically altered. They are given the inner dynamic they need to become powerful witnesses for Christ and His kingdom.

Second, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a *promise for all believers*. Jesus called the experience “the promise of the Father” (Luke 24:49). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter announced to the crowd that “the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39). This means that, even today, some two thousand years later, we too can claim this wonderful promise from God. Jesus promised, “Everyone who asks receives.” He then added, “The Father in heaven [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:10, 13).

Finally, it is important that we understand that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a *command from God*. The experience is so essential to the Christian life that the Bible does not present it as an option. Jesus commanded His disciples to “wait for the gift my Father promised.... For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5).

Having briefly defined Spirit baptism, let’s now look at how it is experienced in people’s lives. The importance of the experience is observed in the life of Jesus and in the practice of the Early Church as recorded in the Book of Acts. Jesus himself did not begin His ministry until He was first empowered by the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21-22). The same was true for the Apostles. They did not begin their ministries until they too were empowered by the Spirit (Acts 2). This empowerment-witness pattern continued through the Book of Acts. For instance, Paul first received the Spirit, and then he “at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). In Ephesus the Holy Spirit came on the disciples, and “they spoke in tongues and prophesied.” Then they began to proclaim the gospel so effectively that “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:6, 10).

Luke repeats this pattern in Acts to show the importance of every follower of Jesus being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Today, if the church is to effectively continue the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles, every member of the church must follow Jesus and the Apostles and be baptized in the Holy Spirit just as they were.

Let’s now look at three word pictures used in the New Testament to describe the experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Those three word pictures are as follows:

- Believers are “baptized in” the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit “comes upon” believers
- Believers are “filled with” the Holy Spirit

Each of these word pictures tells us something important about the experience.

First, Jesus depicted the experience as a “baptism in” the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). To baptize something literally means ‘to submerge, or plunge, it into water or some other liquid.’ This is what happens when a minister baptizes a new believer. He plunges them into the water until they are completely submerged. In the same way, when a believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit, Jesus takes them and plunges them into the Holy Spirit. They are thus covered with and overwhelmed by God’s power and presence. We would rightly expect this to be a powerful, life-changing experience.

Second, Scripture refers to the baptism in the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit “coming upon” believers. Jesus told His disciples, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit *comes on* you...” (Acts 1:8). You will remember that, on the Day of Pentecost, “what seemed to be tongues of fire...separated and *came to rest* on each of them” (2:3). This pattern continues throughout the Book of Acts. For instance, in Ephesus, “when Paul placed his hands on [the twelve disciples], the Holy Spirit *came on* them...” (19:6). In Acts, every time the Holy Spirit

comes upon someone the result is Spirit-empowered witness in word and deed. We can expect the same thing to happen today.

Finally, the Bible depicts the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a “filling with” the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, “all of them were *filled with the Holy Spirit* and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). The term “filled with” is used several other times in Acts. Thus, at the same moment a man or woman is baptized in the Holy Spirit, they are also filled with the Spirit. The Spirit of God comes into them, pervading every part of their being. The baptism in the Holy Spirit thus affects every area of one’s life. In Acts, every time the author uses this term, the result is Spirit-empowered speech.

This lesson is **important** because in it you have learned about the powerful, life-changing experience known as the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The **main truth** from this lesson is that God wants every follower of Jesus Christ to be baptized in, and thus empowered by, the Holy Spirit.

Let’s **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson:

1. What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit?  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a powerful, life-transforming experience from God, promised to all believers, you answered correctly.
2. Why must every Christian be baptized in the Holy Spirit?  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that every believer must be baptized in the Holy Spirit because Jesus has commanded it and because the experience gives us power for life and ministry, you are right.
3. Name three word pictures the Bible uses to describe the baptism in the Holy Spirit.  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that, in the Bible, the experience is depicted as a “baptism in” the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit “coming upon” believers, and believers being “filled with” the Holy Spirit, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to begin asking God to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. As you pray remember why you need to be filled with the Spirit, that is, so you can be Christ’s Spirit-empowered witness to the lost. You should also share this powerful message with your friends. Memorize this Bible verse about the Day of Pentecost: “All of them were *filled with the Holy Spirit* and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). Memorize one more verse to encourage the believers: “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).