

Is Spirit Baptism a One-Time Event?

Acts 1

BQ062512

The following is an excerpt from
The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Acts 1.

for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now... (1:4)

A magnificent comparison to this sense of the promise is the baptism of Jesus Christ. Our Lord was obviously in perfect accord and fellowship with the Holy Spirit, yet at the moment of His baptism, Scripture says, “heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove” (Luke 3:21–22). This was emblematic of the fullness of power He would receive from the Spirit to do His earthly work. One chapter later, Luke records that Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” (4:1). When He spoke in the Nazareth synagogue He began by giving testimony to the unusual enabling of the Spirit by saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19). Luke 5:17 suggests the same source for His healing power.

Others received such anointing for unusual service, such as Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, who by that power prophesied (Luke 1:67–79). In all of those cases, the Holy Spirit came in special fullness to enable unusually powerful ministry to take place.

Jesus further defines the promise of the Father for them as what **you heard of from Me** (cf. John 14:16–21; 15:26; 20:22). Our Lord’s next words, **for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now**, are reminiscent of John the Baptist’s statement in John 1:33: “He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ ” The promise was to be fulfilled, and the disciples would be **baptized with the Holy Spirit, not many days from now**—ten to be exact. Jesus promised that after He departed, He would send the Spirit (John 16:7).

Despite the claims of many, the apostles’ and early disciples’ experience is not the norm for believers today. They were given unique enabling of the Holy Spirit for their special duties. They also received the general and common baptism with the Holy Spirit in an uncommon way, subsequent to conversion. All believers since the church began are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Yet these early apostles and believers were told to wait, showing the change that came in the church age. They were in the transitional period associated with the birth of the church. In the present age, baptism by Christ through the agency of the Holy

Spirit takes place for all believers at conversion. At that moment, every believer is placed into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). At that point the Spirit also takes up His permanent residency in the converted person's soul, so there is no such thing as a Christian who does not yet have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9; cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not a special privilege for some believers, nor are believers challenged and exhorted in Scripture to seek it. It is not even their responsibility to prepare for it by praying, pleading, tarrying, or any other means. The passive voice of the verb translated **be baptized** indicates the baptism by Jesus Christ with the Spirit is entirely a divine activity. It comes, like salvation itself, through grace, not human effort. Titus 3:5–6 says, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” God sovereignly pours out the Holy Spirit on those He saves.

The Spirit's presence, leading, and might were absolutely essential if the apostles were to be effective in continuing the Lord's unfinished work. They had already experienced His saving, guiding, teaching, and miracle-working power. Soon they would **receive** the **power** they needed for ministry after **the Holy Spirit** fell on them.

Power translates *dunamis*, from which the English word “dynamite” derives. All believers have in them spiritual dynamite for use of gifts, service, fellowship, and witness. They need to experience the release of that power in their lives through not grieving the Spirit by sin (Eph. 4:30), and being continually filled and controlled by the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). The latter takes place as believers yield moment by moment control of their lives to Him, and is the same as yielding their minds to the Word (Col. 3:16). The result of being filled with the Spirit is expressed by Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16, 20 “that [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. ... Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us...” (For a complete discussion of the filling of the Spirit, see *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1986].)

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