



Filled with the Spirit *Part 2*

By: Anthony D. Palma

This article addresses the question of subsequence in relation to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Is there, for the believer, a distinct, identifiable experience of the Spirit separable from His work in regeneration? The thesis presented here is twofold: (1) The New Testament teaches the existence, availability, and desirability of such an experience for all Christians. (2) This experience is logically and theologically separate from the conversion experience, though it may take place either immediately upon conversion or after a time lapse. The focus in this article will be on the fact of such an experience.

In biblical studies it is axiomatic that for any given area of theology, one must go primarily to the biblical passages that treat the subject most extensively. Luke, especially in the Book of Acts, deals with the subject of Spirit baptism more than any other biblical writer. His reputation as an accurate historian has been adequately established; therefore, incidents he has recorded must be viewed as genuine. Furthermore, he is also a theologian, using the medium of history to convey theological truth. And his writings were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, what Luke says and teaches must be placed alongside other biblical writings and must not be construed to be antithetical to them. The biblical writers complement—they do not contradict—one another. Proper procedure is to determine what a particular writer or writing says and then relate it to other parts of Scripture.

NARRATIVE EXAMPLES IN ACTS

The Book of Acts is more than an objective recording of Early Church history. Many of the events it contains have a theological purpose—to show the spread of the gospel throughout the Mediterranean world by the enabling of the Holy Spirit (1:8). The two themes of evangelization and Spirit empowerment are so intertwined that one cannot be understood apart from the other. Luke was surely aware of other aspects of the Spirit's work; his close association with Paul would have exposed him to much of Paul's thoughts about the Holy Spirit. But in the Book of Acts, Luke chose to focus on the dynamistic, some say charismatic, aspect of the Spirit's ministry.

The first instance of disciples receiving a Spirit-empowering experience occurred on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2:1–4. Luke later relates four other incidents in which converts have initial Spirit experiences similar to that of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost.¹ It will be instructive to review and investigate these five instances, after which inferences and conclusions will be drawn.²

THE DAY OF PENTECOST (ACTS 2:1–4)

The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the waiting disciples on the Day of Pentecost was unprecedented. In one very important sense, it was a unique, once-for-all event prophesied especially by Joel (2:28,29) and bestowed by the ascended Jesus (Acts 2:33). The audiovisual phenomena of wind and fire are reminiscent of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:18; Deuteronomy 5:4) and other Old Testament special manifestations (theophanies) of God's presence (2 Samuel 22:16; Job 37:10; Ezekiel 13:13). Wind is an emblem of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 37:9; John 3:8); indeed, the Hebrew word *ruach* means both wind and spirit, as does the comparable Greek word *pneuma*. The word *pnoe* (used in Acts 2:2) is a form of the same Greek word. Fire is also associated with the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament (Judges 15:14), in the promise that Jesus would baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11;

Luke 3:16), and in the identification of the “seven lamps of fire” with the Holy Spirit (Revelation 4:5; notice the mention of the Holy Spirit in connection with Zechariah’s vision of the seven lamps [Zechariah 4:2-6]). The historic significance of the Day of Pentecost cannot be overemphasized. Some regard it as the birthday of the Church, others as the counterpart of the giving of the Law and, therefore, the institution of the new covenant. Our concern in this article is with the personal significance of the Day of Pentecost for the disciples upon whom the Spirit came.

Was the disciples’ Pentecost experience subsequent to their conversion? If those disciples had died prior to the outpouring of the Spirit, would they have gone to be with the Lord? The answer is obvious. On one occasion Jesus told the Seventy, “Rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:20).³ But did Jesus’ followers experience, prior to the Day of Pentecost, regeneration in the New Testament sense of that expression?

Pentecostals often point to John 20:22 as the point in time when they experienced regeneration. Jesus “breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” The reasoning is then that their being filled with the Spirit occurred 7 weeks later. In my judgment it is questionable whether the event recorded in John 20:19-23 should be identified as the new birth. The following points need to be made:

1. The unusual verb for breathe (emphysao) occurs only here in the New Testament, but it is found in the Septuagint in connection with the creation of man: “The Lord God breathed into his [man’s] nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2:7). Some argue that just as God’s breath gave life to Adam, so Jesus’ breath gave spiritual life to those 10 apostles. While there is a verbal parallel between the two passages, that in itself cannot sustain the position that the disciples were here born again. New Testament writers often use Old Testament language almost unconsciously.
2. An alternate translation would read, “He breathed [exhaled] and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (translation mine).
3. Only 10 people would have been born again on that occasion. When would all the other believers be born again?
4. The context does not say anything happened to those disciples at that time. Jesus’ breath was anticipatory of what would happen on the Day of Pentecost. The phenomenon of “a noise like a violent, rushing wind” (Acts 2:2) very likely reminded them of Jesus’ act of breathing 7 weeks earlier.
5. The immediate context, both before and after, relates Jesus’ saying to service, not salvation: “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained” (verse 23). This is similar to Jesus’ later statement: “You shall receive power; and you shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8).
6. Pentecostals should be cautious in trying to prove the concept of subsequence on the basis of John 20:22.

An alternative, which I suggest, is that we are not required to pinpoint the moment at which Jesus’ disciples experienced new birth in the New Testament sense. It is possible, in view of the unique historical situation at the time, that the descent of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost included His regenerating work, typified by the wind (John 3:8), which preceded the experience of being filled with the Spirit. But we must note that the wind and fire were not a part of the disciples being filled with the Spirit.⁴

The question remains, however, why there was a 10-day interval between the ascension of Jesus and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Jesus instructed the disciples “to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). The most satisfying explanation is that the Feast of Pentecost had typological significance that was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, just as the Feast of Passover was fulfilled in the death of Jesus. Both the death of Jesus and the descent of the Spirit were divinely timed to coincide with the Old Testament feasts that foreshadowed them. The Feast of Pentecost was a harvest festival, at which the firstfruits of the harvest were offered to the Lord. Acts 2 celebrates a harvest of 3,000 persons who were gathered into the kingdom of God. It is worth noting that pilgrims would have been in Jerusalem from all parts of the Roman Empire.

THE SAMARITAN PENTECOST (ACTS 8:14-20)

If we must look for one incident that illustrates the doctrine of subsequence, none is more decisive than the experience of the Samaritan converts. This passage is the clearest of all for the Pentecostal and the most troublesome for the non-Pentecostal. Consider my observations and comments.

1. Philip's message to the Samaritans was clear. He proclaimed Christ to them (Acts 8:5); he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (verse 12).
2. Philip's ministry was attested by "the signs which he was performing" (verse 6), which included demon expulsions and healings.
3. The Samaritans who believed were baptized. It is unthinkable that Philip would have baptized them or permitted them to be baptized if they had not been genuinely converted.
4. The apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had "received the word" (verse 14). This expression is synonymous with being converted (Luke 8:13; Acts 2:41; 11:1; 17:11,12; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:13; James 1:21).
5. The endorsement of the Jerusalem leadership was indeed desirable, almost imperative, in view of the long-standing animosity between Jews and Samaritans. This incident shows that neither conversion nor baptism entails receiving the Spirit in the sense that Luke uses the expression.
6. The Scriptures nowhere teach or imply that salvation is received by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17). The Book of Acts does show, however, that sometimes a postconversion experience of the Spirit is received following the imposition of hands (9:17; 19:6).
7. This experience of the Spirit by the Samaritans was not the internal change that comes at conversion. It had an external, observable aspect. As F.F. Bruce, the eminent New Testament scholar, comments: "The receiving of the Holy Spirit in Acts is connected with the manifestation of some spiritual gift."⁶

The Samaritans' unusual and identifiable experience of the Spirit some while after their conversion and baptism is a strong argument in favor of the doctrine of subsequence.

SAUL OF TARSUS (ACTS 9:17)

Three days after his conversion, Saul was visited by Ananias who laid hands on him and said, "The Lord Jesus has sent me so that you may be filled with the Holy Spirit." My observations include:

1. Ananias did not call upon Saul to repent, but he did tell him to be baptized, which would symbolize the washing away of Saul's sins (Acts 22:16).
2. The imposition of Ananias' hands was in order for Saul to be filled with the Spirit, not to be saved. The imagery of being filled with the Spirit occurs in the Book of Acts first in 2:4. The Scriptures nowhere use this terminology of being filled as a synonym for being saved.
3. There was a time span of 3 days between Saul's conversion and his being filled with the Spirit.
4. An individual, not a group, is filled with the Spirit. Often those who emphasize the redemptive-historical approach focus only on groups, which they say are representative, upon whom God bestowed the Spirit in a special way when He incorporated them into the Church.

CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSEHOLD (ACTS 10:44-48)

The intriguing narrative about Cornelius reaches its high point with the outpouring of the Spirit upon him and his household. Cornelius was not a Christian prior to Peter's visit; he was a Gentile who had forsaken paganism and had embraced Judaism to the extent that he was a God fearer. At the moment Peter spoke of Jesus as the one through whom

“every one who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (verse 43), Cornelius and his household apparently responded in faith. Simultaneously, it seems, they experienced a special outpouring of the Spirit similar to that received by the disciples at Pentecost, as Peter later told the leadership in Jerusalem (11:17; 15:8,9).

The terminology Luke employs to describe their experience of the Spirit is not used elsewhere in the Book of Acts to describe one’s conversion: “the Holy Spirit fell upon” (10:44), “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (10:45; 11:17), “poured out upon” (10:45), “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (11:16). These expressions are interchangeable with terms such as “filled with the Holy Spirit,” found in connection with Pentecost and Saul (2:4; 9:17), and “receiving the Holy Spirit,” found in the Samaria narrative (8:15,17,19). In addition, the Samaria incident speaks of the Holy Spirit “falling upon” the believers (8:16), as well as the experience being a “gift” (8:20)—two additional terminological connections with the Caesarea account.

The Spirit experience of the new believers in Caesarea parallels that of their predecessors in Jerusalem, Damascus, and Samaria. But unlike the experiences of the Samaritans and Saul, its occurrence was virtually simultaneous with their salvation experience.

THE EPHESIAN MEN (ACTS 19:1-7)

Two important and interrelated questions are crucial for a proper understanding of this passage: (1) At the time Paul encountered these men, were they disciples of Christ or disciples of John the Baptist? (2) What did Paul mean when he asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit?” We must remind ourselves that Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit, has accurately given the essence of Paul’s question.

When Paul came to Ephesus, he found “some disciples.” The word disciple (Greek *mathetes*) occurs 30 times in the Book of Acts. Both before and after this passage, it means a disciple of Christ.⁷ There is no reason why Luke would have deviated from his consistent application of the word. Some argue that his use of the word *some/certain* (the Greek indefinite pronoun) implies they were not Jesus’ disciples. But Luke uses the same word in the singular when he speaks about Ananias and Timothy, calling each “a certain disciple” (9:10; 16:1). The simplest explanation for his use of “some” is found in Acts 19:7, which says there were “about twelve men”; Luke was not sure of the exact number.

The situation of these men is comparable to that of Apollos (18:24-28) who was already a believer “speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John” (verse 25). Priscilla and Aquila “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (verse 26). He was a Christian in need of further instruction; so it was with the Ephesian men.

Considerable discussion revolves around Paul’s question: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). Some translations have “since” or “after” instead of “when.” A strict translation, and one which lessens theological bias, is: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit, having believed?” (translation mine). In the Book of Acts, the terminology of “receiving the Holy Spirit” is found in the Samaria and Caesarea accounts (8:15,17,19; 10:47; see also 2:38). Paul, therefore, is asking the Ephesian men if they have had an experience of the Spirit comparable to that of the Samaritan and Caesarean believers. Paul was not playing a theological word game with these men. He acknowledges that they had indeed believed. Much has been written about the tenses of the two verb forms in Paul’s question and whether, from a grammatical standpoint, the receiving of the Spirit should be understood as taking place at the moment of believing or, alternatively, at a time subsequent to the believing.⁸

The context provides the best answer. The experience of the Spirit about which Paul inquired is the experience recorded in verse 6. In this instance it came about by the imposition of his hands and was accompanied by external manifestations similar to those previously experienced by believers (2:4; 10:46). The experience recorded in 19:6 was not coincident with their salvation. Even if one is convinced that Paul, by his question, had reservations about the genuineness of their salvation, the fact remains that this experience of the Spirit followed their baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus and was preceded by the laying on of hands.

It is often maintained that Luke’s portrayal of the Holy Spirit, especially with reference to being filled with the Spirit, differs from that of Paul in his letters. The Ephesus incident, however, shows that Paul, just as Luke, believed in an

experience of the Spirit for believers that was distinguishable from the Spirit's work in salvation.

It is significant that this incident occurred more than 20 years after the Day of Pentecost. Among other things, it teaches that the Pentecostal experience was still available to believers well removed from that day both temporally and geographically.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

The postconversion experience of being baptized in the Spirit is a work of the Spirit distinct from regeneration. It does not imply salvation is a two-stage process.

In three of the five instances (Samaria, Damascus, Ephesus), people who had an identifiable experience of the Spirit were already believers. At Caesarea the experience was virtually simultaneous with the saving faith of Cornelius and his household. In Jerusalem the recipients were already believers in Christ, even though it is difficult (is it even necessary?) to determine with absolute precision the point in time when they were born again in the New Testament sense. A variety of interchangeable terminology is used for the experience: "baptized in the Spirit," "receiving the Spirit," "filled with the Spirit," "the Spirit coming upon." The experience is recorded for groups (Jerusalem, Samaria, Caesarea, Ephesus) as well as for an individual (Damascus).

The imposition of hands is mentioned in three instances (Samaria, Damascus, Ephesus)—by apostles on two occasions (Samaria, Ephesus), by a nonapostle on one (Damascus).

In three instances there was a clear time lapse between conversion and being baptized in the Spirit (Samaria, Damascus, Ephesus). The waiting interval for the Jerusalem outpouring was necessary in order for the typological significance of the Day of Pentecost to be fulfilled. In the case of Caesarea, there was no time lapse.

This postconversion experience of the Spirit is called a gift (2:38; 8:20; 10:45; 11:17). Therefore, it cannot be earned, nor is it a reward for or a badge of holiness.

It is a gift, but it is inappropriate to call it "a second work of grace." Such language implies that a believer can have no experience of God's grace between initial faith in Christ and the initial infilling of the Spirit. Yet every blessing ever received comes from the Lord as a result of His grace.

This distinct, postconversion work of the Spirit does not rule out other experiences of the Spirit that may precede or follow it.

A pattern has emerged from this inductive study pointing up the reality of a postconversion, identifiable work of the Spirit in a believer's life that is sometimes called the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

ENDNOTES

1. In 2:1-4; 8:14-20; 9:17; 10:44-48; 19:1-7.
2. For ease of expression, the following shorthand designations for events in the respective chapters will sometimes be used: Jerusalem or Pentecost (chapter 2); Samaria (chapter 8); Damascus or Paul (chapter 9); Caesarea (chapter 10); Ephesus (chapter 19).
3. Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.
4. A companion inquiry into the significance of the fire is legitimate. A starting point is a consideration of fire in Scripture as a purging, sanctifying element.
5. Responsible Pentecostals teach that a person is indwelt by the Spirit at the time of conversion (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19) but that the baptism in the Spirit is an experience of the Spirit distinct from His indwelling.

6. F.F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text With Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 187. See Part 1 of this series (*Enrichment Journal*, Summer 98) that discussed the difference between Ezekiel's and Joel's prophecies as they relate to the promised Holy Spirit.

7. The only exception is 9:25 where "disciples" is qualified by "his," meaning they were Paul's disciples.

8. A discussion of the issues in Greek grammar, though necessary, cannot be covered in this brief article. The same grammatical construction occurs twice more in this account and in both instances indicates an action that follows, not accompanies, the action of the participle. The men were baptized in Jesus' name after they heard, not while they heard (verse 5). The Spirit came upon them after Paul laid his hands on them, not necessarily at the moment his hands touched them (verse 6).

9. Part 4 of this series will cover wider aspects of the terminology "filled with the Spirit" and "full of the Spirit."

© Anthony D. Palma, Th.D.

Reprinted from *Enrichment* journal Q4, 1998, used with permission.

Anthony D. Palma, Th.D., a longtime Assemblies of God educator, lives in Springfield, Missouri.