



POWER

For Service

THE BAPTISM OF
THE HOLY GHOST

The Baptism of The Holy Ghost: Power For Service

The baptism of the Holy Ghost is the experience of the Holy Spirit coming into a person's life to give power for God's service. Thus, a study of this experience must begin with an exploration of the Person and nature of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The terms Holy Ghost and Holy Spirit are interchangeable in Scripture; they are both translated from the same Greek word in the original texts. The Holy Ghost is not an abstract identity or a remote influence, but a distinct personality of the Godhead. He is God Himself, part of the Trinity that is comprised of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He has personality and all the attributes of Deity.

The Holy Spirit was present at Creation. In Genesis 1:2 we read, "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." From Creation and on through the Bible, we see evidence of Him, but in the New Testament, we find a fuller revelation of the workings of the Holy Spirit.

Every believer is influenced by the Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit who regenerates the heart of man (John 3:3-5; Titus 3:5). The Holy Spirit sanctifies the believer (Romans 15:16; 1 Corinthians 6:11). However, the filling of the Spirit, or the baptism of the Holy Ghost, is an experience beyond regeneration (salvation) and sanctification.

Although the baptism of the Holy Spirit was typified in the Old Testament, and alluded to by Old Testament prophets, it was not until after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus that the Holy Ghost was poured out upon believers. When Jesus completed His work on earth and returned to the Father, the Holy Spirit came as the promised Comforter.

What is the baptism of the Holy Ghost?

There is much to be heard and read today about the baptism of the Holy Ghost. There are various theological understandings and opinions. Some say that this experience was only for the Early Church and not for believers today. Others teach that a person receives all God has for him at the point of conversion. Some think that the baptism is about speaking in tongues. However, we must base our beliefs on Scripture. What does the Bible have to say about the baptism of the Holy Ghost?

John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus, the One of whom he spoke, would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire. In Matthew 3:11 we read: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but 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." The word that is translated baptism means "to be immersed; to be totally covered" and can be understood by looking at the physical demonstration of water baptism. When we come to be baptized in water after we have been saved, we go down into the water and the water completely covers

us. We are immersed, totally under the water. When we receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost, we are totally immersed and covered and filled with the Holy Ghost.

Jesus also used the word baptism in connection with the outpouring of the Holy Ghost. He explained to His disciples that just as John had baptized with water, they would be baptized with the Holy Ghost. The word baptize gave His followers an idea of what they were to expect—that they would be immersed in the Holy Ghost.

Prophecy of the outpouring

Some eight hundred years before Christ came to earth, the prophet Joel wrote of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. His account prophesies events we have seen fulfilled within the past century. In Joel 2:23,28-29 we read, “Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. . . . And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.”

Joel may not have fully understood the prophecy that he gave, but God moved upon him and those words were spoken by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to let us know that there would be an outpouring of the Spirit of God. The Former Rain pertained to the outpouring on the Day of Pentecost; the Latter Rain pertains to the outpouring of the Holy Ghost that began in the early 20th century.

The outpouring on the Day of Pentecost

Just before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He told the disciples that the Holy Ghost would come. He instructed them to tarry in Jerusalem until they received the “promise of the Father,” which was the infilling of the Holy Spirit. We read that a group of 120 people gathered in an upper room in the city of Jerusalem, and they prayed. They had gathered in the Upper Room with one purpose in mind: the Lord had promised He would send power upon them and they were determined to receive it.

Scripture tells us that something happened in that upper room that they had never seen or experienced before—the power of God descended upon them and they were filled with the Holy Ghost. We read, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).

God made His presence known to this group of believers in an outstanding way in this initial outpouring of the Holy Ghost. The coming of the Spirit was accompanied by two manifestations: the sound of “a rushing mighty wind,” and the appearance of “cloven tongues like as of fire.” John the Baptist had foretold One who would baptize “with the Holy

Ghost, and with fire” (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16), and the two physical manifestations made a graphic picture of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The evidence of this amazing event was that those who had been filled began to speak in “other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Those from faraway countries who were in the city for the Day of Pentecost recognized the languages that were spoken and were amazed to hear the believers speaking in languages they had never learned. Peter stood and declared that this was what had been prophesied by the prophet Joel—the Holy Ghost had descended. Peter’s sermon that day resulted in the salvation of three thousand souls. The Holy Ghost, or Pentecostal, dispensation began then and continues until now. In fact, this event marked the birth of the Church.

Other recipients recorded in Scripture

In the years following the Day of Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Ghost continued to be poured out upon believers. Scripture records some of those instances. The Holy Ghost was given about eight years later to Gentiles in the household of Cornelius. Those with Peter immediately recognized that the believers gathered at the house of this Roman centurion had received the gift of the Holy Ghost, for they “heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (Acts 10:46). In Acts 19:6 we read of the Holy Ghost falling on a group of believers at Ephesus, and when that occurred, “they spake with tongues, and prophesied.” All received the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in other tongues—a previously unlearned, distinguishable language.

Pentecostal outpouring on Azusa Street

In periods prior to the 20th century, God poured out His Spirit on individuals here and there. However, those were only “sprinklings” of the “latter rain” prophesied by Joel. In April of 1906, a small group of people from several Christian organizations arranged for prayer meetings in a home located on Bonnie Brae Street in Los Angeles, California. Their purpose was to seek for the infilling of the Holy Ghost, having heard of this experience being received by believers in the Midwest. These people were born-again Christians, subsequently sanctified, and all in one accord, as were those in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost.

Upon this group on Bonnie Brae Street, God poured out His Spirit and baptized them with the Holy Ghost. They experienced the same outward evidence of having received the baptism as did the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, and spoke in other languages “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” When a number received this experience, the word spread, and shortly the meetings were transferred to larger quarters on Azusa Street.

As time went on, the power of the Holy Spirit continued to fall, and thousands received the baptism. People flocked from the four corners of the earth to kindle their torches, and went forth to spread the flame, which began to set fire to the world. Those attending the services compiled the accounts of the meetings into a paper called *The Apostolic Faith*, and the headlines of the first edition blazed out the news, “Pentecost Has Come.” It proclaimed that “many [are] being converted and sanctified and filled with the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues as they did on the day of Pentecost.”

What are the qualifications?

In order to be filled with the Holy Ghost, essential steps must be taken. A person must first be born again, justified by faith. Scripture is clear that the Holy Ghost is not given to the unconverted. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

A second step, entire sanctification, occurs when the saved person goes deeper in consecration and God purges the heart. Believers are not only forgiven for committed acts of sin, but they also need to be delivered from the inherited nature of sin through entire sanctification. The old sinful nature must be crucified so that the new nature of Christ can be fully expressed (Romans 8:2). Then the heart is ready for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

The 120 who gathered in the Upper Room at the time of the initial outpouring were saved individuals; they were the close followers of Christ, and were obviously committed to following His instructions. They had gathered in the Upper Room and had continued in prayer and supplication. When the Day of Pentecost came, ten days after Jesus’ ascension, they were all “with one accord, in one place.” Jesus had prayed for them to experience the unity described by that phrase. In John 17:9 we read His words, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me.” This prayer was not for the lost but for those who were already His followers, and He prayed for God to sanctify them (John 17:17). When the Holy Ghost fell upon them, they were in one accord—evidence that they had been sanctified.

Salvation and sanctification accomplish the forgiveness of sins and the removal of the sin nature. Then the condemnation for committed sins and the nature of sin are gone, and the heart is a suitable dwelling place for the Holy Ghost. The God who wants to live within us is a holy God. The place where He dwells must be a holy place. So we must get the sin taken care of and the heart cleansed. When the habitation is made holy, we are ready to receive the infilling of the Spirit of God.

Pentecostal leaders at the turn of the 20th century were firm advocates of salvation and of sanctification as a second work of grace. These included William Seymour, the leader at the Azusa Street revival; Charles Parham, Seymour’s teacher; and Florence Crawford, one of the key early Azusa Street workers. They understood and taught that the baptism of the Holy Ghost, with the evidence of speaking in tongues, was an experience for those who had been saved and subsequently sanctified. The controversy over whether it was necessary to be sanctified prior to receiving the Holy Ghost began when W. H. Durham, who had visited Azusa and had initially embraced the teachings, preached at a Chicago Pentecostal convention in 1910 and sought to nullify the experience of sanctification as a second definite work of grace, calling his new doctrine “the Finished Work.” This was a departure from what Parham, Seymour, and Florence Crawford taught when the movement began. The Azusa leaders denounced Durham’s doctrine, saying that it made an opening for “spiritualistic counterfeits” of the genuine Pentecostal experience. They held that the Bible clearly teaches that the baptism of the Holy Ghost is for those who have been truly converted, sanctified wholly, and are living a victorious life without sin.

Receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit

How do we receive this experience? The answer is not complicated: it comes through prayer and consecration. When the heart and life are pure before God, the believer should then ask God for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. It is God's desire and intention to bestow this gift on hearts that are prepared to receive it. In Luke 11:9-10 we read, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." The writer goes on to describe how earthly fathers give to their children, and then asks, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13).

Although many consecrations were made when we sought for sanctification, there may yet be something that God is drawing out of our lives when we seek for the Spirit's infilling. God requires a further submission of soul, mind, body, and spirit. He wants to control every thought and plan, and sometimes it takes fervent prayer to let Him completely direct every area of life. Obedience goes hand in hand with submission: Peter proclaimed that the Holy Ghost is given to those who are obedient (Acts 5:32).

We cannot improve on the way the 120 received the baptism on the Day of Pentecost. They prayed and prayed with one purpose in mind, and that was to do what Jesus had said for them to do. You, too, must set yourself to one purpose and pray until you receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Faith is vital in obtaining this experience, just as it is in receiving salvation and sanctification. When a sanctified believer comes to God and asks for the baptism of the Holy Ghost, he must then believe that God's promise is true and reach out in faith to accept the promised gift. Since it is clear that this gift is available (Acts 2:39), and indeed, that we are commanded to receive the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), faith must simply rest on these promises and commands, and step forward to claim the blessing.

The Holy Ghost is a gift, but a gift must be received. As we seek God for the Holy Ghost, we do not have to beg God. He wants to give this experience to us! That fact is an assurance that should bring great praise and rejoicing, and praise opens up a channel directly into the very presence of God. Many have testified that it was when they forgot all about themselves and simply rejoiced and praised God that the witness came.

The evidence of the Holy Spirit

Speaking with other tongues is the external evidence that was chosen as a sign that the Holy Ghost has descended. That evidence is uniform and consistent among all Spirit-filled Christians in all cultures and languages. The baptism of the Holy Ghost is not about tongues, but the Scriptural evidence of receiving the baptism is that the recipient speaks in an unlearned language.

The expression, "speaking in tongues," comes from a compound Greek word from *glossa* (tongue) and *lalia* (speaking). It refers to a language uttered by the human tongue, but

through the power of the Holy Spirit. The language spoken through the anointing of the Holy Spirit will not be gibberish, but a definite language. When the power fell on the Early Church at Pentecost, their hearers “were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language” (Acts 2:6).

We do not need to be overly concerned with how we will speak in tongues. Any true manifestation of the Spirit of God will be accomplished in a manner that will glorify God. The gift of the Holy Ghost is what is being received, and when He comes, He will speak through our voices. As we yield ourselves to Him and allow Him complete freedom to do or say what He wills, He will take control. Our spirit will be enraptured by His presence, and we will glorify Him. The evidence of infilling may be just a few brief words or many hours of words. God knows and He will send the evidence in a manner that we will know. The presence of His Holy Spirit is unmistakable!

The purpose of the baptism

Scripture clearly indicates the purpose for the Holy Ghost being given. Acts 1:8 tells us, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” That power was not provided for the disciples’ personal glorification, but for the benefit of others. It would enable them to be witnesses for Christ throughout all the world—to testify of Jesus’ resurrection.

These 120 had been with the Lord since His crucifixion, and thus they were eyewitnesses to the fact that He had risen from the dead. The Great Commission instructed them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. The known world at that point in history was not as big as it is now, but the disciples did not have the means of transportation we have today. When they heard the instruction to go into the entire world, they no doubt felt much the same as we would today: How are we going to do that? How are we going to let the whole world know that Jesus is alive?

The infilling of the Holy Ghost was what met that need. Power from the Spirit of God provided courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority. The disciples needed all these to fulfill their commission from God.

We have the same need today, and the same provision is available. People are still receiving power in their lives through the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and it is still power for service. The one who receives the Holy Ghost will have anointing and ability to witness or testify of Christ.

The commission He gave to the disciples is the same commission given to us today. We have a responsibility to tell the world that we know Jesus has risen from the dead, that He has changed our lives, and that we have had an encounter with Him. The experience we have with Him is not to be kept to ourselves. The command is to be witnesses of what we have experienced and seen. We will need help from Heaven, so the Lord has promised to send the power we need—the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

The Divine influence of the Holy Spirit

The Greek word that is translated “Comforter” is Parakleetos, which means “Helper” or “Companion.” When the Spirit of God fills a person with His fullness, He is present within to accomplish His ministry of enlightening, guiding, empowering, anointing, and teaching.

When we have been baptized with the Holy Ghost, He guides us into all truth. There will be times when we need to know what the truth of God’s Word is, or what God’s will is in our lives. The Holy Ghost will lead us into an understanding. There will be times when we need divine help to accomplish a task for the Lord. We know our own ability is insufficient. In looking at the original meaning of the word translated “power,” we find it could have been translated “ability.” We will receive ability, abundance, might, and strength when we are filled with the Holy Ghost.

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would abide in us. As soon as we begin our Christian walk, He is with us all along the way, but after we are baptized with the Holy Ghost, He will be within us.

The Holy Spirit will bring all things to our remembrance, “whatsoever I have said unto you.” Perhaps we find ourselves conversing with someone and feel that we should speak a word for God. We may think, I really do not know what is going on inside this person. How can I say the right thing? In such a time, the Spirit of God will direct us and will provide the words for us to speak. He will do a better job of this than we could ever do, even if we gave it much consideration ahead of time. He alone knows the thoughts and intents of the heart! As we simply live for the Lord, the Spirit of God will provide opportunities and help us to be clear and effective witnesses of what we know is the truth.

The Holy Spirit gives life, energy, help, and hope. He will also give us boldness. The religious leaders in the time of the Apostles marveled at the speaking of Peter, John, and the others, because they had not been formally trained in the manner that the religious leaders had been trained. They called Peter and John “unlearned and ignorant men,” but Peter and John had been taught by the Spirit of God and spoke with evident authority. They were told to not preach in the name of Jesus anymore, but they were true to the commission Jesus had left them and went right on proclaiming the truth. They obeyed God rather than man.

For believers today

God baptizes today with the Holy Ghost just as He did in the time of the Early Church. In Acts 2:39, we find Peter’s words after he had received this experience: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” If you are saved and sanctified today, the baptism of the Holy Ghost is for you. There are no exceptions! God is not selective in His promise. He did not say that some could have it but that others could not. God has this experience for everyone who meets His requirements.

Notice that it was not optional with the disciples whether or not to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Jesus commanded them to wait for the promised power. The baptism of the

Holy Ghost is not an option today either. This experience is a necessity for every person who wants his life to be used and blessed by God.

We thank God for those who continue to pray through and receive this experience in our day. If you have not received it, you can. Are you saved? Are you sanctified? If so, the Lord wants to fill you with the Holy Ghost. He wants to put something within you that will charge you. He wants to enable you to live a life revolving around being a witness of the resurrection of Jesus. He wants to give you boldness and authority. He wants to empower you to promote the Gospel that tells men and women they can be saved, that they can know it, and that it can change their lives.

Seek and receive this experience in your life!