

How Should We Answer This Question?

## "HAVE YOU RECEIVED THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY GHOST?"

by Thomas Williamson

**S**ometimes a Christian will be asked whether he or she has been baptized with the Holy Ghost, or whether his church has the baptism with the Holy Ghost. How should we answer this question?

Many theories have been proposed as to the nature of the baptism with the Holy Ghost. Rather than reviewing these, we would do well to examine the Bible references to this immersion in the Holy Spirit. (The Greek word for baptism always refers to immersion, sometimes literally in water or dye, and sometimes immersion in a figurative sense. No other meaning of the word can be found in the New Testament or in ancient Greek literature.)

The baptism with the Holy Ghost was prophesied by John the Baptist as a future event in Matthew 3:11, where it is associated with fire: "*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.*" This prophecy appears also in the parallel passages describing John's ministry. In Mark 1:8 we read. "*I indeed have baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.*" Luke 3:16 tells us, "*I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.*" John 1:33 identifies Christ as the One who would have authority to baptize with the Holy Ghost: "*He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.*"

There are no further references in the Gospels to the baptism with the Holy Ghost. The next reference, in Acts 1:5, leaves us with no doubt as to when

this promised event would take place. Christ, just before His Ascension, told His Apostles: *"For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."* What noteworthy event took place only a few days after the Ascension, 10 days to be exact? Pentecost!

Now that we have pinpointed the time when the promised baptism with the Holy Ghost took place, we can (illegible - lk) Holy Spirit in the Bible. It should be noted, however, that there are some who interpret 1 Corinthians 12:13 (*"For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body . . ."*) as a reference to baptism with the Holy Spirit. Such an interpretation introduces tremendous confusion into an otherwise clear understanding of this subject. The alleged Holy Spirit baptism of 1 Corinthians 12:13, as conceived by those who hold this view, is private, individual, with no fire and no outward manifestations, and occurs at the moment of salvation. How can this concept possibly be reconciled with the baptism with the Holy Ghost of Acts 2, which was public, corporate, with outward manifestations and fire, falling upon already converted believers?

This difficulty is totally eliminated when we realize that the baptism mentioned in I Corinthians 12:13 is water baptism and nothing else. Many commentators do not even believe that the Holy Spirit is mentioned at all in this verse; they regard it as teaching that all those who are members of a local church, or body of Christ, have entered that church through water baptism in oneness of spirit. Others say that the Holy Spirit is in view here, and that it is by the guidance and enablement of the Holy Spirit that we become water-baptized members of a local church. Either interpretation fits well into the context of New Testament teaching; the notion of a Holy Spirit baptism at the moment of conversion does not fit at all. The Holy Spirit enters into all believers at the moment of conversion, so that He indwells all believers (Romans 8:9-16), but we are not told that the Holy Spirit baptizes believers at conversion. According to Ephesians 4:5, there is only one baptism. This must be water baptism, which the Bible teaches; not "Spirit baptism," which the Bible does not teach.

We can conclude, from our study of all that the New Testament teaches about the baptism with the Holy Ghost that this was a glorious historical event by which God authenticated His church at the outset of its ministry, after the Ascension of Christ. There is no command for churches today to seek to duplicate this event, or for individuals to seek to be baptized with or by the Holy Ghost, at or after conversion.

Does this mean that we reject the ministry, gifts and fulness of the Holy Spirit in this age? Absolutely not! We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5:18, and we should be open to all gifts that the Holy Spirit wishes to bestow on us in these last days.

Should we reject the teaching of those who present different views concerning the baptism with the Holy Ghost? Not necessarily. Most teaching of this nature has a sound scriptural basis, even if the teachers have applied an imprecise term to the thing they teach. It would be far better to experience all the blessings, gifts and fullness that the Holy Spirit wishes us to have, and apply the wrong name to that experience, than to be sound in our doctrine and nomenclature without experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We should not be critical of those who describe their experience with the Holy Spirit as a "baptism." Nor should advocates of Holy Spirit baptism be critical of those who prefer not to use that terminology.

We are now ready to come to the conclusion of the whole matter, and answer the question posed at the beginning of this article: "*Have you received the baptism with the Holy Ghost?*" May we always respond to such a question with a humble searching of our hearts, that we might be totally yielded to the Holy Spirit and guided by Him in all aspects of our lives.

But for those wishing to know our relationship to the Biblical doctrine of the baptism with the Holy Ghost, they would do well to phrase the question like this: "Are you a member of a local church of the same faith and practice as the Church at Jerusalem, and thus part of the divine institution which God validated and authenticated by the baptism with the Holy Ghost?"

Your answer to that question is yes, if your church has continued in the Apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42) and requires immersion for membership (Acts 2:41). If you are in such a church, you do not need to leave it in search of the baptism with the Holy Ghost. Yield your life completely to the Holy Spirit, so He can use you more fully in the church you are in.

Additional copies of this tract can be obtained for \$5.00 per hundred postpaid from:

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