



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

"Acts 2:38 says that we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when we are baptised. How can this be harmonised with Acts 8:14-16. Verse 16 says, 'For as yet He had fallen on none of them. They had only been baptised in the name of Jesus'?"

We must begin our study by stating those salient points which are quite clear in the text. Perhaps when we have done this we shall be able to explain them.

- a) There was a great persecution against the Church at Jerusalem. They were all scattered abroad throughout Judaea and Samaria; all, that is except the Apostles.
- b) The ones that were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word.
- c) Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ. The people were greatly impressed by the miracles which he performed.
- d) When the people believed Philip preaching the kingdom, and the name of Christ, they were baptised.
- e) The question infers that the people did not receive the Holy Spirit.
- f) Peter and John had come from Jerusalem to impart the Holy Spirit by laying on hands, See later comments.

FURTHER COMMENTS

We must understand that the 'Philip' being spoken of here is Philip the Evangelist and not Philip the Apostle. If it had been Philip the Apostle then there would have been no need, seemingly, to have waited for Peter and John to come and 'lay on' hands. An insight into the Apostles before they received 'the power from on high' is given by John. When Jesus was speaking to them about His relationship with the Father, Philip appeared not to understand; "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us". The answer of Jesus is explicit, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father". John 14:6ff. Well might Jesus say that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth.

Philip the Evangelist was evidently of good standing in the early Church; he was one of the number chosen to be appointed to see that the Grecian widows were not neglected, Acts 6:5. He was one on whom the Apostles at Jerusalem had 'laid hands'. He was evidently one of the Pentecostal or post-Pentecostal converts, and presumably had received the same

Apostolic promises as all the other converts. We know from Acts 8 that he was able to perform miracles (vv6,7). We now have to ask ourselves:

- a) were those miraculous powers as a result of the 'gift of the Holy Spirit' when he was converted?
- b) were they imparted by the 'laying on' of hands by the Apostles or
- c) was the 'laying on of hands' merely to set the seven apart for specific work?

We are told in Acts 6:3 that the people were asked to look out seven men 'of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom'; Stephen gets a special mention as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (v5). How had they become 'full of the Holy Spirit', and what does this portend? How did the people recognise them as being 'full of the Holy Spirit'; by their ability to perform miracles, or by their standard of life? If the latter, then it would seem that the operation of the Holy Spirit was on the heart, and not an outward manifestation; this view would be consistent with the way we understand the operation of the Holy Spirit in our own lives today. It says in Acts 2:41-47, that they - the converted - 'continued in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayers'. There were 'signs' and 'wonders' done, but these were done by the Apostles See v43.

THE SAMARITAN EXPERIENCE

We might ask ourselves, "What was Philip doing preaching in Samaria when he had been appointed to look after the affairs of the Grecian widows? Had he been sent by the Apostles at Jerusalem, or was he one of those 'scattered abroad' during the persecution. Was Samaria, in fact, a 'special case' (refer to John 4).

We must follow all the steps in this experience in Samaria, and tie them in with others. All the people had given heed to Simon the Sorcerer; they looked upon him as 'the great power of God' (not too far removed from idolatry). The people then believed Philip when he preached the things concerning 'the Kingdom of God'; they accepted Jesus, the Christ; they were then baptised. To me that sounds like obedience to the Gospel. I cannot conceive of a situation in which - when the Gospel is faithfully preached and received - the promised grace of the in-dwelling Spirit will be denied. So why the laying on of hands?

Let's look at the reaction of Simon as recorded in Acts 8. The scripture says, "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the Apostle's hands the Holy Spirit had been given . . ." (v 8). Now what did Simon see which convinced him that the Holy Spirit had been given? It must have been something which the recipients were able to do which they were unable to do previously. This is in line with what happened at Ephesus when Paul found those who had previously been baptised under John's baptism. He taught them about Christ; they were then baptised in the name of Christ; he then laid hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit, and they spake with tongues and prophesied. I believe these were special gifts given by the Holy Spirit at that time to confirm the authority of the Gospel. This also confirmed Apostolic authority, because they were the ones to whom 'the power from on high' had been given in the first place. You will recall that on the Day of Pentecost, Peter said of Christ, "Being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this which *ye now see and hear*" (Acts 2:33). Had not Jesus promised the Apostles this before He left them? Read John 16:1-16.

SOME OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

We must remember that we are looking at a very volatile period in the early history of the Church. Christians had been scattered during the persecution, and had taken the Good News with them. The Apostles, no doubt, would have reports coming in from various regions, and would be trying to keep track of events. We don't know all the details of what was happening, but we do know that in Corinth there was a Paul party, a Peter party, an

Apollos party, and even a Christ party (presumably to off-set the others). There are some things, however, we can say.

1. When a person responded to the Gospel by making a public confession of faith in Christ, that person was forthwith baptised 'into the name of the Lord Jesus'. There was probably a spoken response to a definite question. It is perhaps unfortunate that the R.S.V. and the N.I.V. use the non-amplified text in Acts 8 concerning the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. They omit v37 which reads, in the A.V., "And Philip said, 'If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" My belief is that if Philip had preached thus to the ones in Samaria, then they would have received the gracious gift of the in-dwelling Spirit. The 'laying on' of the hands of Peter and John would then have been for some other reason; we dare not think anything else otherwise our own conversion might be in jeopardy. Don't forget; there had been, and was, great antipathy between Jews and Samaritans. Perhaps the Apostles were confirming the Gospel to Samaria.
2. There can be no question of Holy Spirit baptism in Samaria. This could only be done by Divine Omnipotence; even the Apostles could not administer Holy Spirit baptism. There are only two recorded instances of this type of 'falling'; the first was on the Day of Pentecost, the second was on the household of Cornelius. Peter confirms this in his defence at Jerusalem, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning." See Acts 11:15.

Well, I hope I have said something useful on the question. If the Bible supplied definitive answers to the questions it poses, then no further questions would need to be asked. It doesn't, though, so we shall have to study to find answers based on firm biblical evidence. To give speculative answers to important questions is an insult to readers, and practically worthless to understanding.

(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden,
20 Costessy way, Winstanley, Wigan, WN3 6ES)