



Early last year I answered a question about the Holy Spirit, and it appears that the Holy Spirit continues to be a subject that arouses considerable interest, because I have received several more questions on the same topic. I freely admit that I find this encouraging! It is encouraging because I remember a time when Churches of Christ were actually accused by certain denominations - (quite wrongly, of course), - of not believing in the Holy Spirit.

I suspect that this was because, at that time, there was so much erroneous teaching emerging from so-called 'Pentecostal' and 'charismatic' groups, and so many false claims being made by them, that our own brethren appeared to be reluctant to speak about the Spirit, lest they be misunderstood and regarded as 'digressive'!

Over the next few months, d.v., prompted by the questions, we shall be looking again at what the Scriptures teach concerning the Holy Spirit, in the hope that the study may prove both useful and encouraging.



THIS MONTH'S QUESTION: JOEL'S PROPHECY - JOEL 2; 28,

When God said, through the prophet Joel, that the Spirit would be poured out on 'all flesh', was this fulfilled in Acts 2, in the case of the apostles, and in Acts 10 with the household of Cornelius, or does the prophecy also apply to us today?

Before getting to grips with the question, I think it is important that we should remind ourselves of the place which the Holy Spirit occupies in God's plan of salvation, and that we should also recognize that Acts 2 marks the commencement of the age of His ministry, the age in which we now live and understand the significance of His ministry in God's plan of salvation.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AGE.

In Old Testament times the 'Spirit of God' did not have a *constant* ministry, so far as the nation of Israel was concerned. For instance, He is never said to 'indwell' or 'fill' that nation which was created at Sinai by the enacting of the Mosaic Covenant, in the way He is said to indwell the new people of God that were created by the New Covenant, ratified by the death of Jesus.

Instead, the Old Testament scriptures reveal that there were *special periods of time* when *specialty chosen individuals* were inspired and motivated by the Spirit of God, to enable them to fulfil *special purposes*. But He had no *constant* ministry, and *no special relationship* with the individuals who made up God's ancient people.

THE SCRIPTURES REVEAL HOW THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION UNFOLDED

- 1st. The decision to make Man's salvation possible *originated* in the mind of God Himself, (1st John 4; 9,16).
- 2nd. The plan of salvation was *put into effect* by the Word of God, who "appeared at the end of the age to put away sin..." (Heb. 9:26. Gal. 4: 4-5. John.1: 1 & 14).
- 3rd. When the redemptive work of Christ had been accomplished, the Holy Spirit came to *make the Gospel effective*, (John.16: 7-11).

But the Spirit's ministry could not commence until the Lord Jesus had returned to the Father. This is made clear in John.7: 39, and in John 14:26, where the Lord speaks of "*the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name*".

We see, then, that each member of the Godhead, that is, God, the Word of God and the Spirit of God, or, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are all involved in our redemption. And today, wherever and whenever the Gospel is faithfully preached, the Holy Spirit will seek to produce conviction of the hearts of men and women, on the three important matters stated by the Lord Jesus Himself in the last passage mentioned, *because the Gospel Age is the Age of the Spirit's ministry*.

The prophet Joel, therefore, was predicting the coming of a time when those individuals who received the forgiveness of their sins through faith in, and obedience to, the Christ, would also be granted God's '*dorea*' - His '*free*' or '*extra*' gift of the Holy Spirit, as an '*indwelling Presence*', enabling them to become the people He intends them to become.

It is to this coming of the Holy Spirit that Peter referred on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). In explaining how he and his fellow apostles were able to speak in languages they had never learned, Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel".

BUT THE QUESTION IS, 'WHAT DID PETER MEAN BY 'POURED OUT ON ALL FLESH'?"

- 1) *He did NOT mean that 'all flesh' would receive the 'measure' of the Spirit then being demonstrated by the apostles. (See John 3:34, 'measure' is from 'metron' and means 'capacity').*

The apostles' 'baptism in the Spirit' was something uniquely promised to them by the Lord Jesus Himself, and it was given in order to equip them to undertake an equally unique responsibility as His 'witnesses', (Acts 1:8). Their baptism - their 'overwhelming' in the Spirit - would: -

- *Guide* them into all truth.
- Give them *total recall* of all the things Jesus had taught them.
- Reveal to them *new truths*, John 14:13, 26, and,
- '*Clothe*' them with *power*, Luke 24:49.

Such promises were never made to anyone else in all of biblical history, and, regardless of what some denominations may claim, no-one today receives the 'baptism of the Spirit'.

- 2) *Peter meant that ALL who accepted Jesus as the Christ and submitted to Him in obedience, would also receive God's gift of the Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit is God's own gift. It does not relate to a gift from the Holy Spirit, nor does it relate to the 'gifts of the Spirit', the 'charismata', or miraculous 'grace gifts', about which Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, in 1 Cor. Chapters 12-14.*

That God's gift of the Spirit is available to all, is clear from the fact that Peter said the promise was made '*to you and your children*' - (the Jews to whom he was then speaking), - '*and to all who are afar off*' - (the non-Jews, or Gentiles). See Eph.2: 17. In Acts 5:32, he further states that God gives this gift '*to those who obey Him*'.

- 3) This 'free' or 'extra gift' is *the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. He 'dwells in you', (1 Cor.3:16), so that 'Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have (received) from God', (1 Cor.6:19).*

Furthermore, 'you are in the Spirit if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him', Rom.8:9.

IN SUMMARY, THEN

ALL obedient believers receive the 'Gift of the Spirit'. That is, the Holy Spirit is GOD'S own gift. (Rom.8: 11). This is 'the Spirit who dwells in you'. (See also 1st Cor. 3:16 and 6:19).

The Miraculous gifts, were gifts which the Holy Spirit HIMSELF bestowed on certain individuals, and, according to 1st Cor.12: 11, the Spirit's gifts are given 'as He chooses', or, 'as He wills', and were not given to everyone. This question, "Do all speak in tongues?" clearly implied by Paul in his rhetorical questions in 1st Cor.12: 29-30,

The purpose of the miraculous gifts was to establish the truth and build up the Church. (Rom. 1:11). Paul longed to visit the Church in Rome, to impart some spiritual gift 'to strengthen you'. He was writing about a 'measure' of the Spirit beyond the usual 'gift of the Spirit', which these Roman Christians had already received when they were baptized into Christ. (See Rom. 6).

These spiritual gifts were bestowed on believers by the laying on of the hands of the apostles. (Rom.1: 11 again). Read also, Paul to Timothy, in 2ndTim. 1:6, and notice, 'by the laying on of my hands'.

Only Apostles had the power to lay on hands, to impart spiritual gifts. In Acts 8 we read that Philip went to Samaria to preach the Gospel, (vv. 4ff.) There he displayed miraculous power, performing 'signs and wonders' which endorsed his preaching of the gospel.

The Samaritans believed and were baptized, (v.12).

The apostles in Jerusalem heard of their conversion and 'sent down Peter and John' (v.14), who laid hands on the converts.

Peter himself stated that baptism into Christ brings 'the gift of the Holy Spirit'.

Since the Samaritans had already been baptized into Christ, this imposition of the hands of the apostles was an *additional blessing*, and was followed by a demonstration of gifts of the Spirit, which *Simon must have witnessed* and which impressed him so powerfully that he offered to buy 'this power' (vv.18-19).

Acts 6:6 records that Philip, the evangelist, had, himself, already received the laying on of apostolic hands. Yet, although he performed acts of power in Samaria, he was not able to do what the apostles did. He could not pass on the spiritual gifts to others. Had he been able to do so, the visit of the apostles, Peter and John, would have been unnecessary. This surely means that the age of miraculous spiritual gifts was limited to the lifetime of the apostles and those on whom they laid their hands, and it ended with their deaths.

A final thought. Remember that the Holy Spirit is God's *Gift!* But a gift is only a gift when it is accepted. And the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus as the Holy *Guest!* But He will not enter uninvited!

Questions to:

Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP