

BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

By Roger Stronstad

It is commonplace to observe that the literature of the New Testament contains seven references to being baptized in the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, there is Paul's single, unique reference: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12.13). On the other hand, each of the four Evangelists, namely Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, report that earlier John the Baptist prophesied that his successor will, "baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt. 3.11,12; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.21,22; John 1.29-34). In addition, the Evangelist Luke, who wrote the only sequel to the gospel twice explicitly reports that Jesus baptizes his followers in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.4,5; 11.15-17).

These alleged seven references to being baptized in the Holy Spirit actually only amount to three. Paul's single, unique reference is excluded because it is just that – unique. For Paul the Spirit (rather than the Christ) is the baptizer, and therefore, what Paul writes does not parallel John the Baptist's prophecy that his successor, the Messiah/Christ, will baptize his followers in the Holy Spirit. In addition, because each of the four gospel references parallels the others the four count as only one. Finally, Luke's reports about Jesus referring to John the Baptist's prophecy count as two references. Therefore, in the final analysis, Luke-Acts contains all three references to being baptized in the Holy Spirit. No other writer has even one independent reference.

This brief survey of the relevant New Testament data shows that the term "baptized with the Holy Spirit" is distinctly Lukan. As reported by Luke, John the

Baptist's thrice reported prophecy that the Messiah will baptize in the Holy Spirit is about commissioning-empowerment. The following exposition of Luke's data explicates the New Testament doctrine of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

1. BAPTIZED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Luke uses a rich variety of terms to describe the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Jesus and his followers. These terms are, with but one exception, drawn from the earlier Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, namely, the Septuagint (abbr., LXX). The one exception is the term, "baptized in the Holy Spirit". Apparently John the Baptist introduced the term when he prophesied that his successor (the Messiah/Christ) will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3.16). In fact, all references to the term, baptized in the Holy Spirit, are directly related to John's prophecy (Luke 3.16; Acts 1.4,5; 11.15-17).

1.1 John the Baptist Prophecies

By the time that John the Baptist (hereafter, JBap) begins his ministry many Jews believed that prophecy had ceased in Israel at the time of Malachi. Against this background JBap begins to minister in the Spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1.17; Malachi 3.2; 4.5). Thus, JBap is the first prophet of the long awaited restoration of prophecy among God's people. Ministering as the Spirit-filled prophet of the Most High (Luke 1.15,76) his first and most important prophecy (in the popular sense of prediction) is that his successor will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3.16).

John the Baptist's prophecy about his Spirit-baptizing successor has no direct antecedents in the Hebrew/Greek scriptures of his audiences. Therefore, they would have understood it in the immediate context of his own ministry. Using a commonplace harvest metaphor JBap explains that the Messianic Spirit-baptizing will have two dimensions: 1) blessing (upon the penitent – he will gather the wheat harvest into his barn), and 2) judgment (upon the impenitent – he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire). This chaff destroying fire of judgment echoes his own preaching about the tree destroying fire of judgment which he directed against impenitent Israel (Luke 3.9).

1.2 The Spirit Anoints John the Baptist's Successor.

As prophesied by John the Baptist his successor will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire. But JBap's successor is not qualified to do this until he, himself, is first anointed in the Holy Spirit. This happens through JBap's ministry when his cousin, Jesus of Nazareth, comes to him at the Jordan to be baptized. Luke identifies the essential elements of this episode, writing: "...Jesus also was baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well-pleased'" (Luke 3.21,22). Thus, in the context of Jesus' own baptism by John God publicly approves of Jesus by two witnesses: 1) the witness of the visual and audible signs, and 2) proof from prophecy (Psalm 2.7; Isaiah 42.1). But what does this unprecedented episode mean?

The meaning of Jesus' baptismal experience, both for JBap's audience and for Luke's readership, is not a matter for speculation. This is because Luke, alone among the gospel quartet, reports Jesus' own Spiritful explanation. In the words of the prophet Isaiah he identifies his reception of the Spirit to be his anointing by the Spirit to preach the gospel about the favorable year of the Lord's favor for the poor, the captives, the blind and the down-trodden (Isaiah 61.1). Therefore, according to Jesus' own explanation (an example of 'charismatic exegesis'), his experience at the Jordan is his commissioning empowerment as the Lord's Christ (i.e., anointed one). Indeed, from his Jordan experience onwards Jesus is now, and remains the Spirit-anointed, Spiritful, Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered prophet (Luke 3.22, 4.1,14,18). Finally, having been baptized by the Spirit; i.e., anointed by the Spirit Jesus, in turn, fulfills JBap's prophecy that his successor will baptize in the Holy Spirit.

2. JESUS BAPTIZES IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Luke's first book narrates the story of Jesus – his birth, his commissioning and his life-long Spirit-anointed, Spiritful, Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered ministry. Born to be a Savior (Luke 2.11), the climax and the consummation of his ministry is to be found in his death, his resurrection and his ascension (Luke 23-Acts 1). However, as Lord and Christ (Luke 2.11) the climax and consummation of Jesus' ministry as anointed prophet happens on the first post-Easter Day of Pentecost when he begins to fulfill JBap's prophecy that he will baptize in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.4,5). On this day, accompanied by two typical signs of theophany (wind and fire) Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit about 120 of his

followers at the Temple at the hour of morning prayer (Acts 2.1-4). This commissions them to be his Spirit-empowered, Spirit-filled witnesses (Acts 1.8; 2.4). Luke will later report ongoing examples of Jesus baptizing new believers in the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 8,10,19).

2.1 Four Examples: Jesus Baptizes in the Holy Spirit

Luke reports four widespread examples of Jesus fulfilling JBap's prophecy. Two of these four examples fulfill the prophecy explicitly – the Spirit-baptism of the 120 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2.1-21) and the Spirit-baptism of the extended household of the centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10.1-11.17). Two of Luke's examples are implicit Spirit-baptisms, specifically, the new believers in Samaria (Acts 8) and the believers at Ephesus (Acts 19). As an interpretative principle, just as appropriate examples of the activity of the Spirit throughout Israel's history illuminate Jesus' Spirit-anointing), and just as Jesus' Spirit-anointed commissioning is a paradigm for the Spirit baptism of the 120 disciples in the day of Pentecost, so also the Spirit-baptism of these disciples is a paradigm for interpreting Luke's subsequent examples of Spirit-baptism. Significantly, this principle is validated by the three examples of the charismatic exegesis of these paradigms – by Jesus (Luke 4.16-27) and by Peter (Acts 2.14-21; 11.15-17).

The four examples of Jesus baptizing his followers and their converts will be examined by the following grid: 1) Luke identifies the antecedent spiritual state of those who subsequently will be Spirit-baptized; 2) Luke reports their experience of receiving

the Holy Spirit; 3) Luke identifies the sign of being baptized in the Holy Spirit and 4) Luke explains each example of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

2.1.1 Jesus Baptizes the 120 Believers in Jerusalem.

After his resurrection Jesus transfers the center of his ministry (now to be performed by his disciples) from Capernaum to Jerusalem. Thus, it is in Jerusalem, and not in Galilee, that Jesus initially fulfills JBap's prophecy that he will baptize his followers in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.4,5).

Luke's post-Easter Pentecost narrative includes four essential elements: 1) the gospel record identified the **antecedent Spirit state** of the disciples. Simply put, they are believers before Jesus baptizes them in the Holy Spirit (John 2.11; Acts 11.17); 2) when Jesus pours out the Spirit upon them they have a rich variety of complementary **experiences** – they are baptized in the Holy Spirit, they are empowered by the Spirit and they are filled with the Spirit (Acts 1.5,8; 2.4); 3) several **signs** attest to the outpouring of the Spirit. These include the two metaphorical signs of theophany (the wind and the fire, Acts 2.2,3), and the **sign** of being baptized in the Spirit, namely inspired by the Spirit they spoke unlearned foreign languages, Acts 2.4-8) and 4) Peter **explains** what the outpouring of the Spirit means by applying the Joel text to their experience, namely, God has poured out the Spirit of prophecy upon them (Acts 2.14-21; Joel 2.28-32).

Clearly, what the 120 believers experienced on the Day of Pentecost is their commissioning-empowerment to be Jesus' witnesses. Therefore, their Spirit-baptism echoes and is functionally equivalent to the earlier Spirit-anointing of Jesus. Further,

because the disciples are believers long before the day of Pentecost dawns, and because their experience of the Spirit is functionally equivalent to Jesus' Spirit-anointing, the "conversion-initiation" interpretation of the Spirit-baptism of the disciples is an arbitrary, presuppositionally driven misreading of Luke's Pentecost narrative.

2.1.2 Jesus Baptizes the Believers in Samaria (Acts 8.5-25)

Jesus modeled both a counter cultural and a cross-cultural ministry. For example, he not only made a despised Samaritan the "hero" of one of his parables (Luke 10.25-37) but he also spent two days ministering in Samaria (John 4.1-42). As a result many Samaritans believed that Jesus was the Savior of the world (John 4.42). Therefore, it should not surprise Luke's readership that when persecution against Hellenistic Jewish Christians erupts in Jerusalem at least one of them, namely Philip, flees to the more "gospel friendly" cities of Samaria.

Philip's ministry in Samaria proves to be as effective as Jesus' earlier ministry there had been. Luke reports that many of the Samaritans "believed" his witness about Jesus and were baptized (Acts 8.12). Thus, prior to their reception of the Spirit at the hands of Peter and John they had the same **antecedent spiritual state** – they believed – as the disciples themselves had leading up to the day of Pentecost. Luke describes their **experiences** of the Spirit by two terms: "receiving the Spirit" and having the Spirit "fall upon" them (Acts 8.15-17). Unlike his earlier Pentecost narrative, Luke's Samaritan narrative is silent about the **sign(s)** and the **explanation** of their reception of the Spirit. Nevertheless, a certain magician, Simon, saw an unidentified sign (Acts 8.18) and, in the

absence of any explanation from Luke, his readership will interpret the Samaritan believers' reception of the Spirit according to his Pentecost narrative. Therefore, Luke's readership may confidently (if only tentatively) conclude that the Samaritan believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit when Peter and John prayed that they might receive the Spirit, and that this experience of the Spirit meant for them commissioning-empowerment and not conversion-initiation.

2.1.3 Jesus Baptizes Some Believers in Judea (Acts 10.1-11.18)

In New Testament times the port city of Caesarea was not only Judea's chief sea-port but it was also the administrative center for the Roman province. Sometime after Philip had evangelized Samaria he settled in this city of coastal Judea (Acts 8.40), and sometime after Philip had settled in Caesarea Peter will visit the household of a Roman centurion named Cornelius in Caesarea (Acts 10.1-23).

This Cornelius is a Roman, but he is not an idolatrous pagan. Indeed, his spiritual state is astonishing. On the one hand, he has the same "righteous" **antecedent spiritual state** as did Zacharias, Elizabeth and Simeon before they experienced the Holy Spirit (Acts 10.22; Luke 1.6; 2.25). On the other hand, Cornelius has the same "believing" **antecedent spiritual state** as did the disciples before they were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 11.17). While Peter is witnessing to him, Cornelius **experiences** the Holy Spirit fall upon him, that is, being poured out upon him (Acts 10.44,45). The **sign** that Cornelius has received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10.47) is that he began, "speaking with tongues and exalting God" (Acts 10.46; compare 2.4,11). This

data implies that, like the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, Cornelius and his household have just been baptized in the Holy Spirit. And Luke confirms what his narrative implies. He does this by reporting Peter's **explanation** of this episode to the brethren in Jerusalem. When he heard Cornelius speaking in tongues he connected this sign with JBap's prophecy that Jesus will baptize in the Holy Spirit (Acts 11.15,16). From this Peter concludes that Cornelius has received the same gift as the disciples had received on the day of Pentecost (Acts 11.17). Luke's readership is, therefore, justified in concluding that for Cornelius (as earlier for the disciples) his Spirit-baptism is about commissioning-empowerment and not about conversion-initiation.

2.1.4 Jesus Baptizes Certain Believers at Ephesus (Acts 19.1-7).

Paul the prophet, evangelist and apostle evangelized among Jews and Gentiles from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum (Romans 15.19). The last city which Paul evangelizes before he is arrested in Jerusalem is Ephesus, the great city of Asia (Acts 18.18-21; 19.1-41). Not surprisingly, having reported examples where Jesus has baptized his believing disciples beginning in Jerusalem, and then in all Samaria and Judea, Luke concludes his examples by reporting that about twelve believers in Ephesus are baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 19.1-7).

As always Luke begins his narrative by reporting about the spiritual state of the disciples – here the Ephesian twelve. He identifies their **antecedent spirit state** as “having believed” (Acts 19.2). Luke concludes this narrative, reporting that at the hands of Paul, who has just returned to Ephesus, they will receive the Holy Spirit. This

experience results in the **sign** of “speaking in tongues and prophesying” (Acts 19.6). In contrast to the Pentecost and Caesarean narratives, where Luke reports explicitly that believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit, here the Spirit-baptism is implied in the sign. And so, in this example, as well as in each of his earlier examples, the Spirit-baptizing work of Jesus is about commissioning-empowerment and not about conversion-initiation.

3. REFLECTIONS ABOUT BEING BAPTIZED IN THE SPIRIT

The doctrine of being baptized in the Holy Spirit enters biblical history through the ministry of the prophet, John the Baptist. He prophesies that his successor will baptize in the Holy Spirit (and fire). Luke subsequently reports two explicit and two implicit episodes of Jesus, JBap’s successor, baptizing his followers in the Holy Spirit. But about three years before Jesus begins to baptize in the Holy Spirit he, himself, is anointed by God with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3.22/4.18). Jesus’ Spirit-anointing is functionally equivalent to the Spirit-baptism of his followers and is a paradigm for all subsequent examples of Spirit-baptism.

When Jesus is baptized by JBap he is also anointed by the Spirit for prophetic ministry. Similarly, as Peter’s explanation of the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost makes clear Jesus has just baptized his disciples in the Spirit to empower them for a world-wide prophetic witness (Acts 1.1-2.21). Many years later when Jesus pours out the Spirit in Caesarea Peter concludes that the Gentile believers there have just received the identical experience which he and his companions had received on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 11.17). This can only mean that Jesus has baptized them in the Spirit

to be prophetic witnesses. What is explicitly true of the Jerusalem and Caesarea Spirit-baptisms (Acts 2,10) is implicitly true for the Samaria and Ephesus gifts of the Spirit (Acts 8,19).

The Spirit-baptisms which Jesus performs throughout the history of Acts are objectively imperceptible spiritual experiences. Jesus, however, makes these tangible experiences by giving an attesting sign for the experience. This sign is to speak in (other) tongues as the Spirit gives utterance. Luke reports this sign in his Jerusalem, Caesarea and Ephesus narratives (Acts 2,10,19). In both the Jerusalem and Ephesus narratives Luke identifies this tongues-speech to be a kind of prophesying (Acts 2.17; 19.6). Also, in both the Jerusalem and Caesarea narratives he identifies what is spoken to be prophetic praise (Acts 2.11; 10.46). Finally, the sign of tongues-speech is implicit in the Samaria narrative (Acts 8.18).

The complementary facts that being baptized in the Holy Spirit is for prophetic ministry and that the attesting sign of Spirit-baptism is, itself, a form of prophesying means that being baptized in the Spirit is an experience of commissioning-empowerment for prophetic witness about Jesus. No other interpretation explains the data so well.

Luke builds his doctrine of being baptized in the Holy Spirit on the firm foundation of John the Baptist's prophecy that his successor will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire. In addition, the chief cornerstone of the doctrine is Jesus, whose own ministry is inaugurated when he is anointed by the Spirit at his baptism at the Jordan River (Luke 3.21,22; 4.18-21). As the chief cornerstone this experience of being anointed by the Spirit (commissioned and empowered for ministry) makes "true" the

walls which will later be erected. These four walls, “trued” to Jesus’ paradigmatic experience of the Holy Spirit, are the four examples of commissioning-empowerment when, in turn, Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit believers in Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea (Caesarea) and at the ends of the earth (Ephesus). The roof remains under construction and throughout the ages Jesus continues to baptize, i.e., commission-empower believers to be his Spirit-baptized, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-filled and Spirit-led witnesses from their own Jerusalem and round about to the ends of the earth.