

POWER FROM ON HIGH

The baptism of the Holy Spirit

by Edward Fudge

Almost 2,000 years ago, following the atoning sacrifice made by Jesus Christ and his exaltation in heaven, God poured out his Spirit on Jesus' followers on the earth. Those events marked the beginning of the Last Days -- a time of salvation and messianic blessings to believers in all nations. This era, foretold by the prophets, will continue until Jesus returns to judge the world and to bring about the consummation of God's everlasting Kingdom. During the interim, Jesus is present with his people through the Holy Spirit -- and he immerses them in his personal Presence and power.

1. THE NEED FOR PENTECOST

The greatest need of every Christian and every church today is a sustained consciousness of the personal Presence and power of the Living God.

Old Testament devotion. The height of Old Testament devotion is found in such cries as these from the Book of Psalms:

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to meditate in his temple. . . . When Thou didst say, "Seek My face," my heart said to Thee, "Thy face, O LORD, I shall seek." Do not hide Thy face from me (Psalm 27:4, 8).

Or hear these words from another Psalm:

As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God [or, "see the face of God"]? (Psalm 42:1-2.)

Do you long for intimacy with God? Have you ever sought God's face as the Psalmist did - passionately, earnestly, continually? Is that the desire of your heart?

Our eternal goal. The epitome of spiritual blessing in the Age to Come is found in the closing vision of the Book of Revelation, in these words -- "and they shall see His face" (Rev. 22:4). The greatest joy in the New Heavens and New Earth is not golden streets or pearl gates, or even freedom from pain and from death. It is to see the face of God!

The prophetic vision. The hope of the Hebrew prophets climaxes, not in physical victory over physical enemies, not return to the Land of Israel, not peace and prosperity, but in the vision of a time when God would live once again in intimate communion with his people (Ezek. 36:22-28; Hosea 14:4-7;

Joel 2:23-27; Micah 7:7-9, 14-15; Zeph. 3:14-17; Zech. 2:4-5, 10-11). That will be a time of wonderful salvation, enormous joy, and great praising of God by those whom he has redeemed from sin through his Messiah, and has brought near to himself.

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, my soul will exult in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation; he has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness. . . . For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations” (Isaiah 61:10-11).

The source of all these messianic blessings will be God’s own Presence.

Then you will say on that day, “I will give thanks to Thee, O LORD; for although Thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou dost comfort me. . . . “
Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation. And in that day you will say, “Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples; make them remember that his name is exalted. Praise the LORD in song, for he has done excellent things; let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for *great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel*” (Isaiah 12:1-6).

The means of God’s Presence in the day of messianic salvation, joy and praise will be God’s own Spirit - the same Spirit that once hovered over the face of the chaotic Deep in creation - the Spirit that inspired prophets, sanctified priests and dedicated kings. When the Messiah has accomplished atonement for sin, then, say the ancient prophets, God will give his Spirit to *all* his people whom he will call.

Thus you will know that *I am in the midst* of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is no other. . . . And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind, and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth. . . . And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered [or “saved”] . . . even among [those] whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:27-30, 32).

2. THE BACKGROUND FOR PENTECOST

This is the larger biblical setting for the event of Pentecost - the coming of the personal, powerful Presence of the living God and of the risen Jesus, now at God’s right hand.

A progressive story. Pentecost is part of the progressive biblical story of God drawing near to his people.

The Old Testament reveals God *over* us. Throughout these earlier Scriptures, God is the creating, covenant-making, redeeming, judgment God. He is high and holy - removed from his people. When God symbolizes his Presence among his people in the Tabernacle and the Temple, He is notably distant and unapproachable. This is most apparent in the rituals surrounding *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). Only the high priest can enter the Most Holy Place, and he only on this one day each year. When he enters, he must come with blood, for he and his people are sinners who cannot casually

approach the holy God. Even then, the high priest comes within a cloud of incense smoke, for no mere mortal can truly see God's face and live.

The Gospels reveal God *among* us. Through the miracle of the Incarnation, we see and know God in the man Jesus of Nazareth. In his humanity, Jesus makes atonement for sin and removes all barriers between God and his people.

Pentecost reveals God *in* us. In Acts 1, Jesus ascends bodily into heaven to take his seat of honor for the atonement he has accomplished. In Acts 2, he comes again in the Spirit to be in and with his people until the end of the world. Shortly before he ascends into heaven, Jesus tells his disciples:

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. . . . You will behold me. . . . In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him (John 14:18-20, 23).

The presence of Jesus. As Jesus is about to return to the Father, he promises his continual presence among his followers as they carry out the mission he has entrusted to them.

Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, *I am with you always*, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

The words at the end of Mark's Gospel in some translations, not found in the best ancient manuscripts but added by the earliest church, say the same thing in a different way. Jesus' presence means the presence of God's mighty kingdom. Where Jesus is, there is the kingdom. And where the kingdom is, God's power is manifested according to his sovereign purpose and rule. It would not surprise us, therefore, for Jesus to say - as the Book of Acts actually reports - that:

These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name [by My presence, through My power] they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick; and they will recover (Mark 16:17-18).

As he begins writing the Book of Acts, Luke emphasizes the continuity between Jesus' past activity in the flesh, and his ongoing activity through those who receive his Spirit from heaven after his own ascension to the Father. "The first account I composed, Theophilus [the Gospel of Luke] about all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach, until the day when He was taken up" (Acts 1:1-2). It is plain that Luke views his report in this second volume, the Book of Acts, as the record of the things Jesus *continued* to do and to teach through his Spirit, poured out on his disciples.

Even to the Laodicean church, wealthy and self-satisfied in its own eyes, but which Jesus saw as "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked," the risen and ascended Lord Jesus offers his own spiritual presence, in the final book of the New Testament.

Be zealous, therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me (Rev. 3:19-20).

One and the same God. The understanding of God as Trinity came upon the church through its own experience of God and that of Israel before it. In the progression of God's drawing near, his covenant people encounter him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet there is but one God, whom we see most clearly in Jesus of Nazareth.

We know God by looking at Jesus. Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). We need not be afraid of God, for he has shown us himself in Jesus. When my daughter was very small, she became afraid one night as she said her bedtime prayers. "Why are you afraid?" I asked. "Because God is so big and strong." "Are you afraid of Jesus?" I inquired gently. She thought a moment and smiled. "No, I'm not afraid of Jesus." "Then you don't need to be afraid of God," I explained. "Jesus is God's Son and God is exactly like Jesus." She considered this for a moment and went happily to sleep.

Similarly, to receive the Holy Spirit is to receive the Spirit of Jesus. We need never to be frightened of the Holy Spirit. We may gladly welcome the Spirit of Jesus in his fullness, with whatever he may bring and do.

Jack Hayford, pastor of Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California, tells of his own early fear of the Holy Spirit. He likens his anxiety to that of a man sitting in an empty church building, down near the front. Suddenly the back door creaks open and someone slips in. As the man sits quietly, scared in his pew, the newcomer slowly moves toward the place where he is sitting. Finally, when the man least expects it, the newcomer suddenly grabs him and shouts "Gotcha!" That is the way, Hayford said, he used to fear the Holy Spirit. Such fear also prompted the elder of one congregation in the 1960's, who exclaimed: "We don't want any of that Holy Spirit stuff in *this* church!" He did not realize that a church without the Holy Spirit is a church without Christ or his Father.

To see Jesus is to see the Father. To receive the Spirit is to receive the Spirit of Jesus. When we focus on God in this way, it changes our perspective concerning the Book of Acts. The second chapter of Acts is not "about" the church - although it involves the church. It is not "about" baptism - although it includes baptism. Pentecost is about God coming to live in his people. It is about Jesus returning spiritually to accompany his disciples - empowering them for the mission he has given them to do.

3. THE BLESSING OF PENTECOST

As we look more closely now at the Book of Acts, we will see the essence of what happened at Pentecost, those for whom this gift is intended, and its relation to baptism in water.

Immersion in the divine Presence and power. The gift of Pentecost is, most of all, the privilege given to every believer to be immersed in the personal Presence and power of the Living God - the Spirit of the crucified, risen and ascended Jesus Christ. This is what it means in Acts to be "baptized in the Holy Spirit." (For those who enjoy footnotes, I mention that scholars as diverse as the non-charismatic D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones of England, and the foremost charismatic scholar J. Rodman Williams, both agree with this definition.)

For all who believe in Jesus. This baptism of the Holy Spirit - this being immersed in the personal Presence and power of God and the risen Jesus Christ - is for all of God's people, not just for a select few. That is strikingly clear in the preaching of John the Baptist, forerunner to the Savior. Mark

describes John's proclamation like this.

All the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem. And they were being baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. . . . And he was preaching, and saying, "After me comes One who is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to stoop down and untie the thongs of His sandals. I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:5, 7-8).

Here John promises the crowds at large - men and women representing "all the country of Judea" and "all the people of Jerusalem" - that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. Sometimes people mistakenly say that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was only for the Apostles, or only for the Apostles and Cornelius, or only for certain other first-century folk. However, Jesus does not even call his first apostle, in Mark's Gospel, until verse 16 - at least seven weeks after John the Baptist spoke the words we just read.

Both Matthew (3:5-11) and Luke (3:2-18) give the same account as Mark. John the Baptist promises the Judean audiences at large that Jesus will baptize them in the Holy Spirit. Also like Mark, Matthew and Luke first mention an apostle at least seven weeks later - in Galilee, not in Judea. John's Gospel does not provide the details of the Baptist's preaching, but simply says that God had told John the Baptist the One on whom he saw the Spirit descend and remain is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit (John 1:33).

The most natural reading of Acts 1-2 strongly suggests that the outpouring or baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost included the whole company of believers in Jesus, not only the Apostles.

[1:14] These with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. [15] And Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about *one hundred and twenty persons* was there together) [and discusses the need to replace Judas]. [23] And *they* put forward two men [24] And *they* prayed [26] And *they* drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. [2:1-4] And when the day of Pentecost had come, *they* were *all* together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto *them* tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of *them*. And *they* were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving *them* utterance.

Distinct from baptism in water. Throughout the Gospels and Acts, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is carefully distinguished from baptism in water. Both John the Baptist and Jesus contrasted water baptism -which John and other ordinary human beings can administer - and baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is administered only by Jesus Christ (Mark 1:7-8; Acts 1:5).

Baptism in the Spirit also varies in timing in relation to water baptism. Sometimes it seems to accompany water baptism (Acts 2:38). In the case of the Italian household at Caesarea, baptism of the Holy Spirit preceded baptism in water (10:43-48). However, the people of Samaria and the disciples at Ephesus received the baptism of the Holy Spirit some time after they had been baptized in water (8:14-17; 19:1-7). The Ephesians had been baptized two times in water - once with John's baptism, and again in the name of Jesus - but Jesus did not baptize them in the Holy Spirit until even later (19:1-7). It is possible that all those who were baptized in the Spirit on Pentecost had received water baptism from

John the Baptist earlier, but that is not stated. In any event, the Bible never connects, but only contrasts, John's baptism in water and baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Yet it is important to say that this biblical distinction between baptism in water and baptism in the Holy Spirit never minimizes the need for or the importance of water baptism in the name of Jesus. Although those who were gathered at Cornelius' house in Caesarea were baptized with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, Peter still commanded them to be baptized in water (Acts 10:48). Indeed, their reception by God, evidenced by his pouring out the Spirit, provided additional incentive for Peter to baptize them in water, signifying among other things their full inclusion into the Christian community (Acts 11:15-17; 15:8).

Finally, there is never any competition in Acts between water baptism and baptism in the Spirit. These two baptisms not only have different administrators - earthly human beings in the first case, and the ascended, glorified Jesus in the second - but they relate to different realities and purposes. Water baptism in the name of Jesus (or of the Trinity, in Matthew 28:19) relates to forgiveness of sins. Baptism of the Spirit relates to empowerment for service, and particularly for the mission of proclaiming Jesus Christ to every person and to all the nations.

4. THE DIVERSITY OF PENTECOST

Anyone who reads the Book of Acts very carefully will be struck with the enormous diversity which Luke reports, both in his descriptions for the Pentecostal experience and in its effects on those who receive it. That is an important biblical point for today, when so many people in various Christian camps are sometimes so dogmatic in limiting the usage of biblical terminology relating to the Holy Spirit, and in either demanding or forbidding particular divine activity in connection with baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Interchangeable descriptions. Throughout his second volume, Luke freely overlaps, mixes and combines a wide variety of terms to describe this reality of immersion in the Presence and power of God. I find at least nine such expressions for this same blessing. Luke speaks of being *baptized* with or a *baptism* of the Spirit (Acts 1:5; 11:16); of being *filled* with the Holy Spirit (2:4; 4:8; 11:24; 13:9, 52); of the Spirit being *poured forth* (2:17-18), or *falling on* (8:16; 10:44; 11:15) or *coming on* (19:6) someone; of the *gift* of the Spirit or the Spirit being *given* (2:38; 11:17; 15:8); of the *promise* of the Spirit (1:4; 2:39); of *times of refreshing* (3:19); and of someone *receiving* the Spirit (19:2).

If we view the various reported occurrences of this outpouring or baptism of the Spirit in Acts, we discover that Luke combines, overlaps and interchanges various clusters of descriptive terms. He identifies the Jerusalem outpouring on Pentecost as *the promise*, being *baptized* with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit *coming upon*, being *filled* with the Spirit and the *gift* of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-8; 2:4-39). The Samaritan outpouring he portrays as *receiving* the Spirit and the Spirit *falling on*, which he contrasts with water *baptism* (8:14-17). Luke describes the Caesarean outpouring as the *gift* or God's *giving*, the Spirit being *poured out* and *falling*, the Spirit *received*, and as a *baptism* (10:44-48; 11:15-17; 15:7-8). And the Ephesian outpouring, says Luke, involved the Holy Spirit *coming on* people who *received* it (19:1-7). Someone today might wish to distinguish or to separate the baptism of the Holy Spirit from being filled with the Spirit or receiving the gift of the Spirit, but one cannot look successfully to the Book of Acts for support in making such distinctions.

Diversity of effects. The Book of Acts also demonstrates a great diversity in the *effects* of baptism in the Holy Spirit - the blessing which began on Pentecost of believers being immersed or overwhelmed in the personal Presence and power of God and of the risen Jesus Christ. Luke mentions at least a dozen different results or manifestations of that experience, as follows.

1. Audible and visible tokens of wind and fire - both primal elements of energy and power (2: 2-3).
2. Spiritual praise in language naturally unknown to the speaker (2:4-8; 10:46; 19:6). Even at Pentecost, those who speak in other tongues are "declaring the wonders of God," not preaching the gospel as such (2:4, 11 NIV). The listeners all hear in their respective languages, but the speakers are not said to normally speak or to understand the languages in which they are speaking. After a large crowd gathers, Peter stands up and announces the resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth as God's messiah - presumably in a language both he and his audience understood in common. Luke does not say whether anyone understood the utterances given in tongues at Caesarea (Acts 10:46) or at Ephesus (19:6), although he does say that the Cornelius household was "exalting God" (10:46).
3. Signs and wonders (2:43) - any variety of supernatural manifestations which *signify*

their divine origin and create *wonder* in those who observe.

4. The house was shaken - a tangible, observable phenomenon (4:31).
5. A vision of heaven and of the ascended Lord Jesus (7:55). This is the only time the Bible mentions Jesus standing in heaven - perhaps as a gesture of honor for Stephen who is martyred immediately following the vision.
6. An overwhelming sense of awe (2:43).
7. An extraordinary spirit of sharing and generosity (2:44; 4:32).
8. Gladness and joy (2:46; 13:52).
9. A praise-filled life (2:47).
10. Bold proclamation about Jesus as Savior and Lord (2:14ff; 4:8; 5:31; 6:8; 11:24). This is the most frequently stated effect of an outpouring, baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit.
11. Wonderful cleansing of the soul (15:9).
12. Prophesying, or supernaturally delivering a message from God (2:17-18; 19:6).

In view of this striking scriptural diversity, we must say two things. First, that when someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit, we may *expect* any of these manifestations, or any others which may please God who is sovereign and who gives the Spirit. Second, that we must not *require* any particular manifestation on any given occasion, or judge the experience to be inauthentic solely by the absence of any particular biblical effect.

A permanent Christian experience. On Pentecost, Peter announced the beginning of the last days of messianic blessing, the time when God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh. There is no suggestion anywhere in Acts (or in the rest of Scripture, carefully read) that the baptism of the Holy Spirit or any of its manifestations were temporary, or that they were intended to end with some period or event now ancient to us. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb. 13:8). Jesus promised his Presence throughout the present age (Matt. 28:20). As my friend Joe Beam likes to say, “The Holy Spirit *came* to the earth on Pentecost. That is not when he *left*.”

A repeatable Christian experience. This immersion at Pentecost in the Presence and power of God and of the exalted Jesus was not a one-time event. Luke identifies by the same clusters of descriptive terms the experience of the Samaritans (Acts 8), of the Caesareans (Acts 10, 11, 15) and of the Ephesians (Acts 19). Nor is there justification in the biblical text - of Acts or otherwise - for supposing that this experience can occur only once in the life of any believer. Throughout Acts, the earliest Christians were repeatedly said to be “filled” with the Holy Spirit - one of the terms Luke uses interchangeably with the “baptism” of the Spirit.

Millions of believers throughout the past 2,000 years have testified to this same experience which the Bible describes, among other ways, as baptism in the Holy Spirit - and with many of the same results reported in the Book of Acts. These believers include such notable mainstream evangelists as John and Charles Wesley in the 18th century, and Charles G. Finney and Dwight L. Moody in the 19th

century. This is indeed a Pentecostal experience in biblical terms, but it is not “Pentecostal” in any denominational or sectarian sense. God has been pouring out his Spirit for nearly two millennia now, on sons and daughters, young and old, servant and master, just as Joel prophesied and Peter proclaimed on the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts chapter two.

5. THE INVITATION TO PENTECOST

The second chapter of Acts tells us that Jesus’ original band of followers were immersed by the ascended, exalted Lord in the personal Presence and power of God himself - the baptism of the Holy Spirit - an equipping with power for Christian life and mission. According to Joel’s promise, John’s proclamation and Jesus’ promise, this experience is the privilege of everyone who believes in Jesus as Lord and who follows him. It is God’s empowerment for “you and your children,” for all those whom God will call (Acts 2:39). It is therefore fitting to conclude these thoughts with a question, a promise and an invitation.

A question. When Paul encountered 12 disciples at Ephesus, he asked them: “Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?” (Acts 19:2). Paul did not ask, “What do you *know* about the Holy Spirit?” but “Have you *received* the Holy Spirit?” We might ask ourselves the same question today. But how does one receive this divine outpouring? The answer comes in a promise made by Jesus Christ himself.

A promise. Jesus promised those who follow him:

Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. . . . If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? (Luke 11:9, 13). Jesus’ promise is clear. But the Savior not only promises - he also invites.

An invitation. Jesus still invites his people today, as he did so long ago: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:19-20). Will you say *Yes* to Jesus today?

Invite him - through his Spirit - to fill your heart, to shape your life, to gift and to empower you for service. He will *baptize* you with the very Presence of God. Jesus will *pour out* his own Spirit on you, *fill* you with that Spirit to overflowing. This is Jesus’ *gift* to you as a believer, the *promise* of the Father, that the Spirit may *fall on* you, *come on* you. You can *receive* this personal Presence and power of God and of the exalted Jesus Christ, just as the first band of believers did on the Day of Pentecost. Indeed, these are *times of refreshing* for the people of God!