

# TONGUE-SPEAKING AND BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

by

**Philip R. Bryan, Ph.D.**

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## *Introduction*

In the summer issue of *The Pastor's Quest* (i.e., 1974) we made a study of Paul's doctrine of tongue-speaking. The conclusion was reached then that (1) the New Testament practice of tongue-speaking consisted of foreign languages, (2) its purpose was to be a sign to Jews, (3) not every Christian was expected to exercise this gift, and (4) the Corinthians had been practicing a false type of this gift--ecstatic speaking. In this issue consideration will be given to tongue-speaking as it relates to baptism in the Holy Spirit.

## *John's Promise of Baptism*

### *in the Spirit*

Early in his ministry, John the Baptist promised: "I [emphatic] have baptized you in water, but He [emphatic; i.e., Jesus Christ] will baptize you in [the] Holy Spirit" (Mk. 1:8; see also Matt. 3:11, Lk. 3:16, Acts 1:5. *Unless stated otherwise, all translations in this article are the author's.*). The wording of this promise and its repetition in the Gospels and Acts indicate that the fulfillment would be general (if not universal) and that it would be a very important part of the Ministry of the Christ who was coming after

John.

### *Fulfillment of the Promise*

In the introductory lines of Acts, Luke neatly tied this promise on to what follows in his account of the early days after the ascension of Jesus. Most Bible students will agree that Acts 1:8 is the key verse to interpreting Acts. In fact, it serves as an outline for the book. So the events to follow in Acts should be interpreted in the light of John's promise of the baptism which Jesus was going to perform.

When the Acts passages relating to tongue-speaking and/or baptism in the Spirit are analyzed, difficulty arises in finding a precise, consistent picture or interpretation. At least one liberally-oriented New Testament scholar has concluded that Luke made a mess of his account and consequently a consistent picture is lacking! Such a negative conclusion, however, is not necessary, although admittedly the task is difficult. At least four passages are germane to this task.

### *Acts 2--Jews*

The first passage which indeed serves as a basis for interpreting the doctrine of baptism in the Spirit is the Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. In this dramatic experience, clearly foreign languages were spoken (2:8, 11). Peter interpreted the event as a sign of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit in latter days (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-21). Because of (1) the close proximity of this event with Luke's introductory remarks about John's promise and (2) the details in which he described it, clearly Luke intended to set forth the Pentecost experience as a (or *the*) fulfillment of John's promise (see also Acts 11:15-17 where Peter directly linked Pentecost with John's prediction). The tongue-speaking, therefore, was a sign of the fulfillment of John's promise--which was actually the fulfillment of Joel's earlier prophecy.

The important statement in Joel's prophecy is recorded in Acts 2:17: "I will pour out of [or *from* my Spirit upon all flesh." After explaining about Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Peter stated that Jesus has "received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit [and]. . . has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (2:33). The outpouring of the Spirit was vitally related, therefore, to the essentials of the gospel proclamation. Upon hearing this sermon, the onlookers "were pierced to the heart," and they asked, "What shall we do?" (v. 37). Peter then gave the classic statement about repentance and baptism. Significantly, however, he stated that *they* also "will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise [of Joel and John?] is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself" (vv. 39-40; see also Acts 5:32).

The point is that Pentecost signifies that the gift of the Holy Spirit--i.e., the Holy Spirit is

the gift--is the birthright of all Christians. The new age has dawned. All believers are to have the Holy Spirit. Peter, therefore, interpreted the event in terms of salvation and a universal reception of the Spirit. This coincides nicely with Paul's teaching in Romans 8 and Jesus' promise of the Comforter (John 14-16) A man who is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit is not saved (Rom. 8:9): This indwelling is normative for all believers; reception of the Spirit is not a "second blessing."

In passing, note that the Spirit "fell upon" saved, baptized, Jewish believers who thereupon spoke in foreign languages. In the next relevant passage, however, the pattern will change.

### *Acts 8--Samaritans*

Acts 8:2-17 gives the account of the reception of the Holy Spirit by disciples in Samaria. In this case, however, the believers did not receive the Spirit until "the apostles in Jerusalem . . . sent . . . Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (8:14-15). These people already had "been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 16). Only after they had begun "laying their hands upon them. . . were they receiving [the] Holy Spirit (v. 17). The reference to baptism "in the name of the Lord Jesus" implies that the reception of the Holy Spirit was "baptism in the Spirit." Therefore, a new element has been added: prayer and the laying on of the apostles' hands. No reference is made, however, to tongue-speaking. Moreover, these believers were Samaritans, not Jews. In the next account of spirit-baptism, another element is added, and the pattern is changed drastically.

### *Acts 10-11--Gentiles*

In Acts 10 and 11 appears the interesting description of the conversion of some Gentiles and their reception of the Holy Spirit. In this case, however, "while Peter was still speaking . . . words [about belief in Jesus for "forgiveness of sins"], the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message" (Acts 10:44). These men also started "speaking with tongues and exalting God" (v. 47). Peter, therefore, "ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (v. 48). Reception of the Spirit and tongue-speaking, however, was not interpreted by Peter as a "second work of grace" but as a sign that "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also" (v. 45). In Peter's subsequent report to the brethren at Jerusalem, he asked: "If God therefore gave to them the same gift as to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I should stand in God's way?" (11:17). The Jerusalem brethren agreed with Peter and said: "Well then, God has given to the Gentiles also the repentance unto life" (11:18). Both Peter and the Jerusalem brethren, therefore, interpreted the spiritual experience among Cornelius and his household as a sign of their salvation and a sign that the Christian gospel is for Gentiles also.

The pattern here at Caesarea, therefore, was: preaching, reception of the Spirit, tongue-

speaking, and baptism in the name of Jesus. There was no praying or "tarrying" for a "second work of grace"; moreover, people (Gentiles) were saved--*before* submitting to (water) baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (see also Acts 9:17-18 where Saul received the Spirit before he was baptized). In the next account of tongue-speaking in Acts, the pattern changes again.

### ***Acts 19--Disciples of John the Baptist***

In Acts 19:1-7 Luke related the events which transpired when "Paul . . . came to Ephesus, and found some disciples" (19:1) who possibly had received some religious instruction from Apollos (18:24-19:1). Paul asked them an interesting question: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" (19:2). The "when" should not be stressed, however, for there is a difficulty in determining precisely whether the Greek word *pisteusantes* should be translated "when you believed" (NASB, RSV, Phillips, NEB, *et al.*) or "since [ or *after*] you believed" (KJV *et al.*). The former translation would emphasize reception of the Spirit as occurring simultaneously with the act of believing or as a logical inference or result of belief. The latter translation (KJV) would emphasize the temporal sequence of belief and reception of the Spirit. Admittedly, the rest of the story, especially the laying on of Paul's hands, as well as the usual way of translating an Aorist participle, would argue for the latter translation, (i.e., "since" or "after"). Pentecostals use this to argue for tongue-speaking as the sign of a "second blessing." Before making a final conclusion, however, other elements of the story must be considered.

The disciples' answer "no, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit" (v. 2) could satisfy either of the possibilities of interpretation given above. His next question, their response, and his subsequent actions, however, imply that these disciples were not only suffering from the absence of the Holy Spirit but they were also lacking the most important matter of salvation. They claimed to be disciples of John the Baptist (v.3). Paul, however, told them that John the Baptist preached repentance and faith in Jesus. Upon hearing this, "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). After Paul had placed his hands "upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they started speaking in tongues and prophesying" (v. 6).

Why did Paul have these "disciples" submit to baptism in the name of Jesus? Apparently other disciples of John the Baptist did not undergo a rebaptism; therefore, these men were not really believers in Christ. That is why they had not heard that "there is a Holy Spirit." The grammatical problem probably can be solved by seeing the participle in verse 2 as setting forth a *logical* sequence--"having believed." Clearly this is the usage of a similar Aorist participle in Acts 11:17. In Pauline theology, all believers have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

The pattern in chapter 19, therefore, is as follows: preaching, baptism (rebaptism in this case since the other had been invalid due to lack of belief in Jesus), laying on of hands, and tongue-speaking.

*Some Preliminary Conclusions*

The pattern and sequence of events in the Acts accounts differ radically:

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*Acts 2*

Belief

Baptism

Reception of Spirit

Tongue-Speaking

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*Acts 8*

Belief

Baptism

Prayer and Laying on of Hands

Reception of Spirit

=====

*Acts 10 & 11*

Belief

Reception of Spirit

Tongue-Speaking

Baptism

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*Acts 19*

Baptism

Belief

Baptism

Laying on of Hands

Reception of Spirit

Tongue-Speaking

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Before attempting to determine the harmony of these actions, it would be well to set forth several preliminary conclusions: (1) The gift of the Spirit is universal for all believers, but tongue-speaking is not (remember also Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 12). Therefore, Pentecostalism is wrong. (2) Baptismal regeneration theories are wrong. As evidenced in Acts 10, salvation--signified there by the reception of the Spirit--precedes baptism. (3) The expression "baptism in the Holy Spirit" is not an important term; it appears only twice in Acts, although it may be implied in other passages. (4) Tongue-speaking was a sign to show the universality of the message of Christ and the universality of the reception of the Holy Spirit. (5) To Jews reception of the Spirit (including tongue-speaking) was a sign of salvation.

### ***Probable Solution to the Problem***

Although the problem probably cannot be solved completely to everyone's satisfaction, the following considerations seem to point to proper resolution:

(1) Significantly, these four accounts in Acts coincide rather nicely with Acts 1:8, the verse generally accepted as being an outline of Acts. Luke described successively how four different types of believers received the Holy Spirit: Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and followers of John the Baptist.

(2) The purpose of having four accounts is to demonstrate the universal reception of the Holy Spirit--that "the promise" is indeed to "as many as the Lord . . . shall call" (Acts 2:40).

(3) Tongue-speaking--in various foreign languages--was a further sign to show that the message of the gospel is for all nations and races of people. The four-fold account of different races corroborates this interpretation.

(4) The descriptions of different people receiving the Spirit at different times and in different ways demonstrate also that the apostolic age must be seen as a transitional age. The new age had dawned--as evidenced by Pentecost--but the Holy Spirit did not at that precise moment come upon all believers wherever they might be. Laying on of hands

probably signified stamp of approval by the apostles at Jerusalem (Acts 8). With the close of the apostolic age and the completion of the canon of Scripture, the miraculous gifts ceased. As Paul said, the Scriptures have been given so that "the man of God may be adequate, fully-equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). The Word of God and the indwelling Spirit are all that the believer needs to serve God!

(5) The extraordinary phenomena of tongue-speaking and other manifestations of the Spirit in each of these accounts were intended for *Jews* as signs of the dawning of the new age which the prophets had promised (remember the observation made in the last issue about Paul's statement that tongue-speaking was a sign to Jews; *PQ*, 17 [Summer, 1974], 11). Without such occurrences the Jews gathered at Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost would not have accepted the validity of Christianity. It would take much to bring about the radical changes needed in their religious belief. Moreover, the signs of laying on of hands by the apostles and accompanying phenomena were designed to prove that the promise indeed had been extended to the hated Samaritans (Acts 8). In the other two cases--Gentiles and disciples of John the Baptist--the purpose was apparently the same. This interpretation is corroborated in the account of the conversion of Cornelius, for Peter used these events to justify to the other brethren--Jews--that Gentiles should be baptized also.

### ***Relationship between Tongue-Speaking and Baptism in the Holy Spirit***

When the book of Acts is compared with Paul's teaching to the Corinthian church, several things become certain. (1) Tongue-speaking is nowhere asserted to be a universal phenomenon. (2) In both places it was a sign to Jews that the speakers had received the Holy Spirit. (3) When the Acts teaching that all believers are to receive the Spirit is compared with Paul's position in Romans 8 and contrasted with his statement to the Corinthians that tongue-speaking was not a gift for every Christian, then it becomes clear that tongue-speaking was not the only sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit. (4) Since apostolic days, every believer, as soon as he believes and is saved, receives the Holy Spirit--he is baptized (immersed) in the Holy Spirit. One might even note that Paul told the Corinthians that "we have all been baptized in one spirit" even though we do not all speak in tongues (1 Cor. 12:12ff.). Probably, however, "baptized in one spirit" in 1 Corinthians 12:12 does not refer to what is described in Acts but points to baptism in water. (5) Tongue-speaking, a phenomenon of the apostolic age, therefore, has ceased in this age, for it is no longer needed as a sign to Jews.

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