

LESSON 193

THE CHURCH BAPTIZED

Related Scripture: Acts 1:1-11

KEY VERSE: "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."—Acts 1:5.

Lesson Scripture: Acts 2:1-4, 14-21, 36, 41-43

Introduction:

Baptism in the literal sense, as all informed persons know, is immersion in water. Respectable scholars even of denominations that substitute sprinkling for baptism admit to this fact.

Salvation is one thing and baptism is another. Saved persons are commanded to be baptized—after they are saved or born again. Baptism does not save or help to save, in the sense of regeneration, but is an ordinance symbolizing the gospel believed by the born-again child of God.

Likewise, baptism in the Holy Spirit did not create, form, or give birth to any church. The church of our Lord Jesus Christ was organized by Himself during His own personal ministry, and it was this church which was baptized all at once on the day of Pentecost.

As the individual believer is scripturally baptized (in water) only once, and that after his new birth; so the church as an institution was baptized (in the Spirit) only once, and that some two or three years after its organization. Similar signs of the Spirit's presence and power were given on other occasions for special reasons, but the baptism in the Spirit took place only at Pentecost, once and for all.

Literal baptism (in water) of the individual believer is prerequisite to church membership; so the baptism of the whole church in the Holy Spirit was prerequisite to the exercise of divine power in obeying the divine command. (Acts 1:8.)

Some popular superstitions and prejudices contradict the simple truths declared above. Before the reader jumps to any conclusions, let him carefully study the lesson under the following outline:

1. Descent of Power, Acts 2:1-4
 - a. Power of Spirit, 1
 - b. Power of sound, 2
 - c. Power of sight, 3
 - d. Power of speech, 4
2. Defense of Power, Acts 2:14-16
 - a. Getting attention, 14
 - b. Giving assurance, 15
 - c. Gaining authority, 16
3. Destiny of Power, Acts 2:17-21
 - a. Power in service, 17, 18
 - b. Power in signs, 19, 20
 - c. Power in salvation, 21
4. Declaration of Power, Acts 2:36
5. Decisions of Power, Acts 2:41-43
 - a. Believers baptized, 41
 - b. Fellowship followed, 42
 - c. Apostles accredited, 43

Notes on the Printed Text:

Descent of Power, Acts 2:1-4.

There is general agreement that what took place on the day of Pentecost was what John the Baptist earlier (Mat. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lu. 3:16; Jn. 1:33) and Jesus shortly before His return to heaven (Acts 1:5) called baptism "with" (more properly in) the Holy Ghost. Beyond this point, there is much disagreement in "interpretation" of what took place and of its significance for us.

We need to beware of "interpretations" that set forth doctrines not to be found in the inspired word, or what is worse, doctrines opposed to what the word clearly says. So numerous and varied are the heresies in this connection that I shall not try to deal with them in this short lesson, deeming it more important to set forth an honest study of what the Bible tells us.

Power of Spirit, 1.

That all the members of the church were at the same place at the same time and of the same mind ("with one accord") is sufficient evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Men do not so agree in the things of God, even children of God do not so agree, apart from the leading and power of His Spirit.

As John the Baptist was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Lu. 1:15); as the same Spirit "descended in a bodily shape like a dove" upon Jesus at His baptism (Lu. 3:22); as Jesus later proclaimed His anointing by "the Spirit of the Lord . . . to preach the gospel" (Lu. 4:18); so now the same Spirit of God had led the members of that first church, through a week of prayer in the temple (Lu. 24:53) following the ascent of their risen Lord, to "wait for the promise of the Father" which they had heard of Him (Acts 1:4).

Power of Sound, 2.

A sound came from heaven. It sounded like "a rushing mighty wind," but it is not said that there was any wind. This sound, "as of" a wind, "filled all the house where they were sitting." God did not need a wind to make a sound like a wind; the sound did not come from a wind, but from heaven.

Power of Sight, 3.

"Cloven tongues" were divided or distributed tongues; not that each tongue was divided, but that they were parted or distributed, so that one fiery appearance of a tongue "sat" upon each member of the church. Again, it is not said that there was any fire, but simply that the appearance of the tongues was "like as of fire."

Power of Speech, 4.

Now the symbolism of the wind-like roar and of the fiery tongues becomes evident: it is the Holy Spirit that gives power to His people for witnessing. (Acts 1:8.) The church was baptized or immersed in the Spirit, the sound of Whose presence filled the house, and individual members "were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

"Tongues" in this verse means languages, as is clearly shown in verses 5 through 11. There was no insane or unintelligible gibberish; the Spirit miraculously "gave utterance" to each member so that they were able individually to witness in foreign languages to the foreign-speaking Jews of "the wonderful works of God."

Defense of Power, Acts 2:14-16.

Naturally those who heard native Galileans speaking other languages, to which they (the speakers) were not accustomed, were amazed and curious. Others in the crowd, perhaps overhearing languages which they could not understand, mockingly said, "These men are full of new wine." Perhaps it was this charge (v. 13) that moved Peter to offer what started as a defense and went on to become a great sermon.

Getting Attention, 14.

When perhaps nearly all the people were sitting, Peter stood with the other apostles and "lifted up his voice" to get attention. His opening words were calculated to hold that attention as he urged the "men of Judea" and all that dwelt at Jerusalem to listen to him in order to get the facts, as we would say.

Giving Assurance, 15.

"These are not drunken, as ye suppose." The mere denial might move the mockers to consider another possibility. Besides, it was too early in the morning for so many to be drunk.

Gaining Authority, 16.

Citation of inspired scripture, however, gains authority for the speaker better than any amount of uninspired argument. It is noteworthy that most of Peter's sermon consists of quotations from Old Testament scriptures. The Holy Spirit does not lead preachers to neglect or ignore His word.

Destiny of Power, Acts 2:17-21.

Prophecies of God's word must be fulfilled. Current events were in accord with prophecy; therefore these manifestations of divine power, along with others still to come, were destined to fulfill the infallible word.

Power in Service, 17, 18.

Miraculous gifts of prophecy, visions, and dreams were among the manifest operations of the Holy Spirit. Of course, people can prophesy after a fashion, and have visions and dreams of sorts, without any special work of the Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is God, and cannot lie. (Titus 1:2.) His miraculous gifts are not subject to error or failure, but are given to enable His servants to render effective and acceptable service.

Power in Signs, 19, 20.

If the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were mostly for the apostolic age, the miraculous signs "in heaven above" and "in the earth beneath" are reserved for the days immediately before "that great and notable day of the Lord." Just how the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, we shall have to wait to see. We can be sure that God has abundant power to show the signs He has promised.

Power in Salvation, 21.

Here is something more wonderful than miraculous gifts or miraculous signs, and something just as true today as ever: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." This is better for us than any other manifestation of divine power. See Luke 10:20.

Declaration of Power, Acts 2:36.

Peter had in effect promised (v. 14) to make something known to his audience. Now he plainly declared the central fact: The "house of Israel" had disbelieved, despised, rejected, hated, and crucified Jesus; but "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." This truth of the gospel, that the crucified Christ is the risen Lord, coming again to judge and punish His enemies, is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." (Ro. 1:16.)

Decisions of Power, Acts 2:41-43.

When men are brought face to face with vital truth they are forced to a decision either to accept or to reject it. To postpone a decision is in effect a temporary decision to reject the truth, and such temporary decisions often become permanent. The gospel of Christ is the most important truth that men have to face, and the Holy Spirit's greatest work has to do with confronting the world with this truth and so convicting men "of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." (Jn. 16:8.)

Believers Baptized, 41.

Unbelievers must remain unbaptized, in a Biblical sense; but "they that gladly received his word were baptized." The Holy Spirit never leads God's children to disobey His word. Genuine believers rejoice in the word of God, and when rightly taught and led by the Spirit they are baptized and "added to the church" (v. 47).

Fellowship Followed, 42.

This is the way baptized believers ought to behave in any church. Having apostolic baptism (immersion in water of a believer in the gospel to declare his faith under Biblical authority), they ought always to continue "in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." This will include the "breaking of bread" in the Lord's supper, and prayers to the God of their salvation.

Apostles Accredited, 43.

Mark says that the Lord was "working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." (Mk. 16:20.) Paul writes of the apostolic testimony that God was "bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." (He. 2:4.) With such manifestations of the divine presence and power, "fear came upon every soul."

Key Verse:

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence."—Acts 1:5.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost accredited the church which Jesus had organized and commissioned as a continuing authority to carry on His work, which included the ordinance of baptism in water first administered by John the Baptist. Scripturally speaking, the individual believer can be baptized in water only once (Eph. 4:5); so the church as an institution was baptized in the Holy Spirit only once, and that on the day of Pentecost, about a week after Jesus spoke the words of this verse.