

LESSON 296

THE CHURCH BAPTIZED

Related Scripture: Isaiah 6:1-13

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, 16-18, 36-42

Introduction:

Literal baptism, in the original meaning of the word, is simply immersion in water. In the sense of a New Testament ordinance, it is the immersion of a born-again believer as a symbolic act under the authority of a New Testament church. The church itself, as an institution, was baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Biblically speaking, water baptism is a continuing ordinance for individual believers, while baptism in the Spirit was experienced once for all by the church as a body at Pentecost. Some perverse pretenders to Christianity refuse the water baptism which the Lord commanded His church to administer while they vainly seek and even claim a supposed "baptism in the Holy Ghost" outside of the one kind of church which was baptized according to His promise nearly 2,000 years ago.

Salvation is in Christ, not in baptism, which is essential to obedience, but not to salvation. Yet the ordinance of baptism, when faithfully administered, teaches the way of salvation, and therefore unknown millions of so-called Anabaptists have been put to death by their persecutors through the centuries—persecutors who usually have called themselves Christians.

Our lesson this week may serve to review Biblical truth about baptism—both the baptism of the first church in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the water baptism administered by that church and by all like churches then and ever since. For an outline note:

1. Immersion, Acts 2:1-3
 - a. Assembled for baptism, 1
 - b. Accredited by baptism, 2
 - c. Afire with baptism, 3
2. Infilling, Acts 2:4
3. Illumination, Acts 2:16-18
 - a. Prophecy fulfilled, 16
 - b. Prophecies following, 17, 18
4. Instruction, Acts 2:36-38
 - a. Crucified Savior, 36
 - b. Convicting Spirit, 37
 - c. Comprehensive salvation, 38
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 - a. Promise applied, 39
 - b. Personal appeal, 40
6. Involvement, Acts 2:41, 42
 - a. Faith before baptism, 41
 - b. Fellowship after baptism, 42

Notes on the Printed Text:

Immersion, Acts 2:1-3.

For the church to be manifestly baptized or immersed in the Holy Spirit, it was necessary that the manifestation of the Spirit's presence fill the whole house where the church was in session, and so it was.

Assembled for Baptism, 1.

Members of the first church understood that the promise of baptism in the Holy Spirit was not to individuals but to the church as a body; therefore at the appointed time "they were all with one accord in one place."

Accredited by Baptism, 2.

Talk of "another Pentecost" is nonsense from a Biblical standpoint. There never was and never will be another such occasion. The first church was accredited once and for all time by this baptism in the Spirit as Christ's administrative body; and this accreditation applies to all later churches of the same kind; that is, of like faith and order.

Repetition of some of the signs of the Spirit's presence in this baptism later on in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18) did not constitute another baptism, but proved to Peter and to the entire first church that Gentile believers were to be admitted to church fellowship in the same body and on the same terms as Jewish believers.

Afire with Baptism, 3.

Visible and audible manifestations such as mentioned in this and the preceding verse are not mentioned as given on any other occasion. This occasion was unique. It is good to be figuratively afire for God—but these appearances of cloven tongues were only "like as" of fire. Of course, fire is one of the symbols of the Holy Spirit.

Infilling, Acts 2:4.

Let us not confuse baptism in the Spirit with being filled by the Spirit. There is no necessary connection. It is possible to dip and fill a cup at the same time, but it can be dipped without filling, and it can be filled without dipping. On this occasion when the whole church was baptized all the members were filled with the Holy Spirit Who surrounded them; but on other occasions individuals are said to be filled with the Spirit, and with no mention of baptism.

Illumination, Acts 2:16-18.

Spiritual light is given to us by the Holy Spirit through His word. It is useful to distinguish between miraculous revelations of God, such as we find in the Bible, and the more normal work of illumination by the Spirit which enables us to understand the truth revealed.

Prophecy Fulfilled, 16.

Biblical prophecies have stood the test of time. Those already fulfilled leave no room for reasonable doubt that all must be fulfilled according to God's written word. Part of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost.

Prophecies Following, 17, 18.

Other miraculous prophecies were to be added to God's word in the book which we now call the New Testament. Also, the word "prophecy" may sometimes mean simply to speak forth or proclaim the word of God, and in this sense all of God's people can and should be prophets.

Instruction, Acts 2:36-38.

Peter's sermon at Pentecost consisted mostly of quotation, exposition, and application of scripture. Can any preacher do better than this?

Crucified Savior, 36.

Guilty unbelieving sinners are engaged in a hopeless rebellion against God, Who is still in complete command (vv. 22-24). "That same Jesus" rejected by depraved sinners is the very One Whom God has made both Lord and Christ.

Convicting Spirit, 37.

"When they heard this" the Holy Spirit used the word to convict them of sin. (Jn. 16:9.) "They were pricked in their heart." In this state of conviction they must do something—but what?

Comprehensive Salvation, 38.

These inquirers were blessed with a faithful preacher, who not only told them to get their sins forgiven through repentance but also directed them to be baptized after and because of the remission of sins. Repentance, in the gospel sense, includes faith, as faith is the end of repentance. "The gift of the Holy Ghost" here is not conditioned upon baptism, but is the necessary accompaniment of repentance and faith. Compare Acts 10:42-48. This "gift of the Holy Spirit" is just as real without as with miraculous signs.

Injunction, Acts 2:39, 40.

Unlike some supposed preachers (whom God has neither called nor sent) who are indifferent to the response of their hearers, Peter was concerned for the salvation of souls.

Promise Applied, 39.

On the human side, "the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off"; on the divine side, it is to "as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Personal Appeal, 40.

Belief in divine sovereignty did not dampen or inhibit Peter's personal appeal or "invitation" to lost sinners, his testifying and exhorting "with many other words." Of course, sinners can "save themselves" only by trusting Christ the Savior. The command, "Save yourselves," could be better translated "Get yourselves saved," or simply "Be saved."

Involvement, Acts 2:41, 42.

Evangelists unfaithful to Christ, as well as false evangelists, may be satisfied with mere professions of faith; but scriptural evangelism must be concerned with genuine, complete, and eternal salvation. Saved people, to get the full benefits of the gospel, need not only the assurance of a place in heaven (Jn. 11:26); they need also to get involved in the service of Christ here on earth.

Faith before Baptism, 41.

Only "they that gladly received his word were baptized," which is to say, those that believed. (Jn. 1:12.) In scriptural practice, faith is prerequisite to baptism, and baptism is prerequisite to church membership.

Fellowship after Baptism, 42.

It seems hardly necessary to point out that these people could not continue "in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" until after they had been admitted to this "doctrine and fellowship" through baptism and church membership.

Key Verse:

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

Properly translated, the preposition "with" should be "in" both times in this verse. This promise of Jesus was fulfilled at Pentecost, and there is no hint in the Bible of any other "baptism with the Holy Ghost."