

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## The Baptism and Power of the Holy Spirit

by Dan Trygg

“John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins....<sup>7</sup> And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.<sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’” Mark 1:4,7,8

“And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Luke 24:49

“John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Acts 1:5

“...you will take up power whenever the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be My witnesses...” Acts 1:8

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...” Acts 2:4

“...you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself.” Acts 2:38,39

“...as God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” Acts 10:38

The biggest obstacle to understanding what the Bible says about the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” is our religious history since the time of the Jesus. As in so many other areas of theology, religion has obscured and clouded what would have been a fairly easy and elementary word picture for those from that time and culture.

“Baptism” has become a religious word to us. We only use it in the context of a religious ceremony. For Jews of the first century, “baptism” (and its variant forms and related words) was an everyday, functional word. It simply meant to “dip, immerse, plunge, or engulf”. Any time you washed your hands or dishes in a basin that contained water, you “plunged” the objects to be cleansed into the water. If you took a bath, you dipped your body into the liquid of the tub. The word, and its variants, occurs 20 times in the Greek translation of the OT. In virtually every case, it means to “dip” or “immerse”. (Ex. 12:22; Lev. 4:6,17; 9:9; 11:32; 14:6,16,51; Num. 19:18; Deut. 33:24; Josh. 3:15; Ruth 2:14; I Sam. 14:27; II Kg. 5:14; 8:15; Job 9:31; Psa. 68:23; Isa. 21:4; Dan. 4:33; 5:21). The Jews dipped hyssop (like a paintbrush) into blood, the priest dipped his finger or objects into blood, articles to be cleansed were immersed in water, they dipped bread into wine, the end of a staff into honey. The Levites dipped their feet into water when the people crossed the river, and Naaman the Syrian dipped himself in the Jordan seven times in obedience to the instructions of Elisha. Job talked about being “plunged” into a pit, and Isaiah spoke of being “engulfed” by horror. Nothing “spooky” or “religiously weird” there. The word occurs 81 times in the Greek NT. Almost all of these refer to “baptism”, in reference to John the “Baptizer”, or Jesus, or the early believers. Only in five examples do we see the underlying meaning of “bathing, dipping or washing” (Mk. 7:4 [2x]; Acts 22:16; Heb. 6:2; 9:10). Yes, by the time of Christ, there were some groups who were practicing ceremonial “baptisms”, some washing themselves several times a day. The point, however, is that people heard this as “washings”, not “baptisms”, because, to them, “baptism” WAS “washing”! It was dipping or immersing in water for the purpose of cleansing. Some Jews got really into ceremonial washings, thinking that this would keep them from defilement before God.

The problem we have is that we have no English word that will accurately cover the same range of meaning that “baptō” and its related words cover. It would be nice to drop “baptism” from our vocabulary, but if we try to find an English equivalent, we miss part of the meaning. We could call John, the “washer” or “the immerser” or even “the water-burier”, but any of these images can only capture *part* of the whole picture contained in the original word. Then, add to *that* difficulty the centuries of religious traditions, debates and controversies, and we have trouble even *talking about* “baptism”, much less understanding it *comfortably*. When you *do* get a comfortable grasp of the word, however, then the phrase, “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” becomes a whole lot less mystical or confusing. If we can get past the religious terminology to the simple, functional word pictures involved, it becomes much easier to grasp.

There are a number of word pictures used of our relation to the Holy Spirit:

(1.) “Baptism” of the Spirit is a “washing” of the Holy Spirit”. John had said that he washed with water, but One coming after Him was so much greater than John, that he wasn’t worthy to untie his shoes. He later identified Jesus as that One, the person who would “wash” them with the Holy Spirit. John could only wash off the outer dirt with water, but Jesus would cleanse the inner man by the Spirit. Isn’t that what Paul says in Titus 3:5? “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration (new birth) and renewing (making new and *better* than before) of the Holy Spirit.” So, it would seem that a “baptism of

**the Spirit” would be a “washing of the Spirit” in the minds of NT Christians.** This would be the cleansing of forgiveness and the transformation of one’s inner self.

**(2.) The baptism of the Spirit is also called a “filling” of the Holy Spirit.** When Ananias came to Saul to pray for his healing, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:16), “Now, why do you delay? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name” (Acts 22:16). *Note again the connection with baptism and washing.* More than that, however, Ananias said he was sent to Saul so that he might be “filled” with the Holy Spirit. **This is the exact terminology used to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They, too, had been “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4).** This is the explanation or description of what took place when they were “baptized” with the Spirit. **Thus, it would also seem that “being filled with the Spirit” is the same as “being baptized by the Holy Spirit”,** or at least, when you are “baptized in” the Holy Spirit, you get “filled with” Him. This terminology is used 8 times in the NT (Lk. 1:41,67; Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; 13:9; Eph. 5:18). **There is no command for Christians to seek to be “baptized by the Holy Spirit”, or to seek a “baptism of the Holy Spirit”, but we are commanded to “be being filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).** That said, there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting to be immersed in the Spirit, or overwhelmed or engulfed by His presence and power. God empowers us to do work, however (e.g., Acts 10:38), not to bask in some experience. I think many of those who are seeking the “baptism of the Spirit” are looking for an emotional, spiritual high, not the empowerment to serve. **In each of the examples we have, the person who was filled expressed themselves to others, testifying joyfully and boldly about the greatness of God.** In Acts 13:9, Paul was filled to boldly confront Elymas, the magician who opposed them, and sought to turn the governor away from listening to their message. *With the filling came supernatural power* to demonstrate that Paul and Barnabas were the servants of the true God. Elymas was blinded by the Holy Spirit, exposing both his deceit and powerlessness before the apostles.

**(3.) Jesus called it “the promise of My Father”** and told the apostles to stay in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power from on high (Lk. 24:49). As He prepared to leave, **Jesus commanded them again not to leave Jerusalem, until they received “what the Father had promised” (Acts 1:4). He then reminded them of John the Washer’s ministry, and what he had said about Jesus, saying that they would “be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now”. Therefore the promise of the Father IS the baptism of the Holy Spirit.**

**(4.) Peter calls it the “gift of the Holy Spirit”.** On two occasions, Peter refers to the experience he and the apostles had at Pentecost as the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38; 10:45). In Acts 2:38-39, Peter equivocates the gift of the Holy Spirit with the promise of the Father. In 10:44-47, as Peter preached the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles. He and his fellow Jews were astonished that “the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.” They recognize it because these Gentiles were speaking in tongues and praising God. Peter then declared, “No one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit *just as we did*, can he?” It is clearly evident that he was referring back to their experience at Pentecost, when they also spoke in tongues. **Thus, the “baptism of the Spirit” from Pentecost was also described as “the gift of the Holy Spirit”.**

**(5.) In this same passage, Peter equivocates the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” with “receiving the Holy Spirit”.** The baptism of the Spirit is the same as “receiving the Spirit”.

**(6.) It is referred to as a “coming upon” of the Spirit.** In Acts 1:8, Jesus was talking about the future baptism of the Spirit, and said, “you shall *take* power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you”. The Greek is more emphatic, “of the coming-upon upon you”. The baptism of the Spirit is a “coming upon” of the Holy Spirit. *Whenever* that happens, Jesus said *we* are to *lay hold* of the power the Spirit makes available to us.

**(7.) Anointing of the Spirit.** This is quoted by Jesus at the beginning of His ministry (Luke 4:18). “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden” (Isa. 61:1). Then, in Acts 10:38, Peter summarizes Jesus’ ministry, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” II Cor. 1:21,22 says that God has anointed *us*, sealed *us* and given *us* the Spirit as a down payment on our full redemption. I John 2:20,27 also refer to the “anointing of the Holy One” which we “have”, ...a reference to the Holy Spirit.

**The ministry of Jesus made possible the Spirit’s coming.** He died for sin, rose in victory, was exalted to the Father’s side, received from Him the Holy Spirit, and poured Him out on the church (Acts 2:22-33). **Because He paid the price, we can be cleansed, transformed, anointed, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit.** The emphasis of the “baptism” of the Spirit is on the washing of renewal. This seems to me to be a *finished* work to build upon, not a *future* promise to be sought. In any case, **what we really need is to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. God will respond to those who seek Him (Lk. 11:13), and the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).**