

# Baptism In the Holy Spirit

**Ac 1:5 “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”**

One of the core doctrines (i.e., teachings) of the NT is the baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Ac 1:4, note on reading “baptism *in*” rather than “baptism with” the Holy Spirit). Concerning the baptism in the Holy Spirit, God’s Word teaches the following.

**Biblical Facts About the Baptism.** The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a gift God wants us to have. Jesus said that this gift is a promise from God the Father (see Joel 2:28–29; Lk 24:49; Ac 1:4–5, 8) to all who truly purpose to follow Christ and fulfill their part in the mission to spread his message.

(1) The baptism in the Spirit is for all who have accepted Christ’s forgiveness and given control of their lives to him. Such people have been “born again” spiritually (Jn 3:3–7). God’s Spirit has come to live within them to transform their lives, redevelop their character and guide them into God’s purposes. Receiving the Holy Spirit in this way (at the point of spiritual salvation), however, is not the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

(2) One of the goals of Christ’s earthly mission was to baptize his followers in the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33; see Lk 3:16, note). Jesus told his disciples that one of the main reasons he had to leave them shortly after his resurrection was so that the Holy Spirit would come and be with them from then on (see Jn 16:5–7). The Spirit’s constant presence is that important. Before he left the earth to return to heaven, Jesus instructed his disciples not to begin their mission of spreading his message throughout the world until they were baptized in the Holy Spirit and “clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24:49; Ac 1:4–5, 8). Jesus Christ himself did not begin his public ministry until he had been “anointed ... with the Holy Spirit and power” (Ac 10:38; cf. Lk 4:1, 18). To be anointed means to be set apart, commissioned and empowered for service. To be baptized suggests being “immersed.” Like Jesus, we must be immersed (i.e., completely soaked or saturated) and empowered by God’s Spirit so we can continue his mission of spreading the good news about forgiveness and new life through faith in him.

(3) The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a work of the Spirit that is distinct and separate from spiritual birth (i.e., salvation). On the day of Christ’s resurrection, he breathed on his disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22), giving them new life spiritually (see article on The Spiritual Rebirth of the Disciples). Then later he told them they must also be “clothed with power” by the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; cf. Ac 1:5, 8). For the disciples, this experience clearly followed their spiritual “birth” which came

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by faith in Jesus Christ (see Ac 11:17, note). The Bible describes a similar sequence of events following the spiritual salvation of the group mentioned in Ac 8:14–17, which says, “When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that people in Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” See also Ac 19:1–7, where disciples in Ephesus, who had accepted the message of Christ and were baptized in water, then received the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues and prophesying (see article on Speaking in Tongues.) Yet, the fact is that a person can be “born again” or “saved” spiritually—which means that the Holy Spirit lives within them—but still not be baptized in the Holy Spirit (see Ac 19:6, note).

(4) To be baptized in the Spirit means to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (compare Ac 1:5; 2:4). The word “baptize” actually means to immerse or to dip into; but since the Spirit works within a person, baptism in the Spirit implies an overflow of the Spirit. For example, a person who receives spiritual salvation is like a container that was once empty being filled with fresh, clean water. Like the container, the person is no longer empty, but has the Holy Spirit living inside (see 1Co 3:16; 6:19). Then, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is like pouring more clean water into the container until it overflows from within (cf. Jn 7:38–39). A person who is baptized in the Spirit becomes saturated and immersed (i.e., “baptized”) with God’s presence to the point that it spills out of his or her life and is so evident that it influences others. The specific experience of being baptized with the Holy Spirit occurred only at and after Pentecost (see Ac 2). For those who were described as filled with the Spirit before Pentecost (e.g., Lk 1:15, 67), Luke does not use the term “baptized” in the Holy Spirit. This would occur only after Christ left the earth and returned to heaven (Lk 24:49–51; Jn 16:7–14; Ac 1:4).

(5) In the book of Acts, the initial outward sign or physical evidence that a believer had been baptized in the Spirit was that they spoke in tongues as the Spirit prompted them, or gave them the ability and the words to speak (Ac 2:4; 10:45–46; 19:6). Speaking in tongues involves a language that the speaker has never learned (Ac 2:4; 1Co 14:14–15), although it may be a language spoken somewhere on earth. (In Ac 2:6, the people who heard the 120 in the upper room speak in tongues recognized the languages.) However, it may also be a heavenly language—unknown to anyone on earth (see 1Co 13:1, where Paul mentions speaking in “tongues of angels”). Whether the language is understandable to the hearers or is like no other language on earth, it is a means of communicating with and expressing praise to God. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is linked so closely with the outward expression of speaking in tongues that this should be considered a normal sign when receiving this baptism (see article on Speaking in Tongues). Some think that this powerful experience, with the evidence of speaking in tongues, was only as a sign to help get the early church started. But the purpose was not just to get people’s attention or prove God’s power as the church

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began. Jesus said the Spirit would provide his followers with ongoing power and guidance (see John 16:13). This purpose is just as relevant today, for we still need that power and guidance to carry on Christ's mission in the world.

(6) The primary purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is to bring the personal boldness and power of God's Spirit into a Christian's life so that he or she can accomplish Christ's purposes with his authority. The highest aim for this spiritual power is to cause Christians to be effective in spreading his message throughout the world (cf. Ac 1:8; 2:14–41; 4:31; 6:8; Ro 15:18–19; 1Co 2:4). This power is not some impersonal force, but is an expression of the Holy Spirit which makes Jesus' presence, power and purposes a reality for his people (Jn 14:16–18; 16:14; 1Co 12:7; see article on The Doctrine Of The Holy Spirit). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not just a matter of speaking in tongues or having a "deeper" spiritual experience. Christ's followers are to use the Spirit's power to share Jesus with those who do not know him. On the day of Pentecost, the outward sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit was speaking in tongues (Ac 2:4), but the outward result was that many who did not know God were introduced to him that day (Ac 2:41).

(7) Other results of a genuine baptism in the Holy Spirit are: (a) prophetic messages (i.e., statements that foretell, warn, challenge, encourage or inspire) and declarations of praise (Ac 2:4, 17; 10:46; 1Co 14:2); (b) greater sensitivity to things that offend God and grieve his Holy Spirit, a deeper awareness of God's judgment against sin and a greater desire and ability to do what is right (see Jn 16:8, note; Ac 1:8, note); (c) a life that brings honor to Jesus Christ (Jn 16:13–14; Ac 4:33); (d) new visions and comprehension of God's purposes (Ac 2:17); (e) active use of the various gifts of the Spirit (1Co 12:4–10; see chart of The Gifts of the Holy Spirit); (f) a greater desire to pray (Ac 2:41–42; 3:1; 4:23–31; 6:4; 10:9; Ro 8:26); (g) a deeper love and understanding of God's Word (Jn 16:13; Ac 2:42); and (h) an increasing awareness of God as one's loving Father (Ac 1:4; Ro 8:15; Gal 4:6). In general, the baptism in the Holy Spirit enhances (i.e., heightens the level of) Christians' personal worship and empowers their public witness (cf. Ac 1:8; Ro 8:26–27; 1Co 14:2–4). For further comments along these lines, see article on Testing for Genuine Baptism in the Spirit.

(8) God's Word gives several conditions that must exist before receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. (a) First, we must accept by faith Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord-the Forgiver of our sins and Leader of our lives-which includes turning from our own sinful way (Ac 2:38–40; 8:12–17). This involves surrendering our own will-our desires, purposes and motivations-to God ("to those who obey him," Ac 5:32). We must avoid and abandon anything that offends God before we can be "an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master" (2Ti 2:21). (b) We must desire to be filled. Christians should have a deep hunger for the baptism in the Spirit and the fullness of God's presence, power and purpose that the Holy Spirit brings (Jn 7:37–39; cf. Isa 44:3; Mt 5:6; 6:33). (c) We often receive this baptism in answer to prayer (Lk

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11:13; Ac 1:14; 2:1–4; 4:31; 8:15, 17). (d) We should expect that God will baptize us in the Holy Spirit (Mk 11:24; Ac 1:4–5).

(9) The baptism in the Holy Spirit is sustained (i.e., maintained and continued in a constant flow) in the believer's life by consistent prayer (Ac 4:31), bold witness (4:31, 33), worship in the Spirit (Eph 5:18–19) and a life that is continually growing in godly character (see Eph 5:18, notes). Though a person's experience may be powerful or extraordinary at the beginning, if they do not develop these disciplines—along with an increasing desire for holiness (i.e., moral purity, spiritual wholeness, separation from evil and dedication to God)—the experience will soon fade. For further comments on how the baptism in the Holy Spirit and praying in tongues can enhance the effectiveness of your prayer life, see article on Speaking in Tongues.

(10) The baptism in the Spirit occurs only once in a Christian's life. It marks a point at which the person is set apart, approved and empowered for God's work of spreading his message in power and purity. The Bible teaches that there may be new or "fresh" fillings with the Holy Spirit after a Christian has been baptized in the Spirit (see Ac 4:31, note; cf. 2:4; 4:8, 31; 13:9; Eph 5:18). The baptism in the Spirit brings a Christian into a special relationship with God's Spirit that is to be continually renewed (Ac 4:31) and maintained (Eph 5:18). One way to ensure the flow and life of this relationship is to pray daily "in the Spirit" (see Ro 8:26, note; Eph 6:18, note). This is a crucial part of one's spiritual development (see 1Co 14:4). Being filled with the Spirit is more than a one-time experience; it is an ongoing aspect of Christian life that enhances one's ability to recognize and respond to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Getting Ready to Receive God's Gift. Once you realize that the baptism in the Holy

Spirit is a gift God wants you to have and a gift that you want and need, you may still have questions about what might happen as you open yourself to be baptized with the Spirit. Keep in mind that your personal experience may differ from that of other people. No one can tell you exactly how things will happen for you, but there are a few things to keep in mind as you get ready to receive:

(1) Get right with God. Repent of any sin (i.e., admit, express true sorrow for and turn from anything that may have offended God), receive forgiveness from Jesus and submit to his leadership in your life.

(2) Ask in faith. Pray and believe that God will fulfill his promise to baptize you in the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16; Ac 1:4; 2:33). Do not doubt that you will speak in tongues as the initial physical evidence that you have received God's gift. A strong desire for greater holiness (i.e., moral purity, spiritual wholeness, separation from evil and dedication to God) should accompany your prayer.

(3) Be prepared. Some physical things may happen, and that is not uncommon. Stammering lips, tears and trembling or shaking may accompany this extraordinary

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experience as God's power often overwhelms a person's physical senses. However, do not try to manipulate the situation by stirring up your emotions. You may have seen well-meaning Christians surround a friend who is praying for the baptism. They may pray louder, get more expressive or try to prompt the friend in some way; but God does not work that way. Do not seek an experience; rather, desire more of Christ.

(4) Stay focused. Receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a choice. Some people never receive because they are waiting for a mystical, uncontrollable experience. But the Spirit does not overpower a person's will. You must cooperate with and invite him into your life. There are times when the Holy Spirit may seem to completely take over as a person speaks effortlessly in tongues. But this is not how you are likely to exercise the gift on a regular daily basis. The Bible teaches that spiritual gifts are subject to (i.e., used at the discretion of) those who receive them (see 1Co 14:32). God does the baptizing, but you are responsible for how you respond.

Receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. There is no specific, lengthy formula to guarantee being baptized in the Holy Spirit; but there are some helpful patterns you can follow as you pray and prepare to receive this powerful gift:

(1) Relax. Receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not always an immediate experience. In the book of Acts, the believers in the upper room waited ten days. Do not get discouraged.

(2) Worship God. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is a means of honoring God. It is not about what you get from him; it is about what he gives to you. Turn your complete attention toward Christ. Create an atmosphere of worship and thanksgiving by expressing love and appreciation out loud, not just in your mind.

(3) Seek the Giver, not the gift. Your focus should not be on tongues or a spiritual experience; it should be on getting more of Jesus and his power in your life. The Holy Spirit's desire and purpose is to draw attention to Christ (Jn 16:13, 14).

(4) Leave your native language so you can speak a new language. As you worship and wait, you may sense strange, unknown words or syllables coming to your mind. You cannot speak two languages at once, so at some point you must stop speaking in your own language and start praising in the spiritual language. The Holy Spirit will bring words to your mind, but you must do the speaking. (If your lips and tongue start stammering or trembling, the Holy Spirit is likely trying to get you to speak. You may not hear the words in your mind, but when you surrender to the Spirit and step out in faith, he will honor your faith and help you speak.)

(5) Speak, even if it does not sound like a language. Many languages and dialects may not sound like anything to you, only because you do not understand them. Being

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filled with the Spirit is not based on your understanding, but on speaking in obedience to the Spirit's leading.

(6) Speak, even if it is only a few syllables. Do not worry if your spiritual language seems limited at first. More will come. Do not go back to your native language after you start speaking in tongues, whether there are many words or just a few. Cooperate with the Spirit. Do not be afraid to move your tongue and lips to form the words. (Keep in mind, however, that another person cannot begin your experience by instructing you in what to say or by giving you incoherent syllables to begin with. Only the Holy Spirit can give you the words.)

(7) Trust that you are getting what you asked for. God promises to give the good gift of the Holy Spirit to those who desire him with all their heart (see Lk 11:9–13). Often, when people begin to sense the Spirit prompting them to speak, they are afraid it might just be their own words or simple gibberish (i.e., meaningless talk). But if your focus is truly on Christ, and you are willing to take a bold step and use the gift, you can be confident that you are getting exactly what he promised.

In summary, Jesus told his followers to expect the gift of baptism in the Holy Spirit (see Lk 24:49) and to be continually filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). He knew the spiritual power and sensitivity it would bring to their lives. From Acts to Revelation, we read about what Jesus' followers did through the power of the Holy Spirit. To this day, the baptism in the Holy Spirit continues to fill Christians with the desire and urgency to carry out Christ's commission to take his message throughout the world (see Ac 1:8; 2:42–47). Baptism in the Holy Spirit is as relevant now as it was in the early church because Christians today need the same power and guidance to live for Christ and accomplish his purposes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Wesley Adams and Donald C. Stamps, [\*Fire Bible\*](#) (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers International, 2011), Ac 1:5.