

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

“And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” Acts 2:38, ASV),.

To what did Peter refer when he said *“ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?”* Some declare that the recipients thereof were to receive something miraculous, and they thus confuse the *“gift of the Holy Spirit”* in Acts 2:38 with the *“gifts”* of the Spirit in I Corinthians 12. However, the *“gift of the Holy Spirit”* in Acts 2:38 was received by reason of repentance and baptism, whereas the *“gifts”* (plural) of the Holy Spirit in I Corinthians 12 were received through *“the laying on of the apostles’ hands”* (cf. Acts 8:18; Acts 19:6; Rom. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:6), the means by which miraculous gifts were imparted and received. But there are others who contend that the *“gift of the Holy Spirit”* in Acts 2:38 refers to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but again we point out that the receiving of the *“gift of the Holy Spirit”* was conditioned upon one repenting of his sins and being baptized *“unto the remission of sins.”* In such case this would demand two baptisms (water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism), but Paul, in Ephesians 4:5, declared that there is *“one baptism”* in effect now. According to my mathematical calculations, *“one baptism”* is one more than **no** baptism and one baptism is one less than **two** baptisms. In view of the fact that the *“gift of the Holy spirit”* is a promise made to **all** who repent and are baptized, and in view of the fact that there is now but *“one baptism”* (i.e., the baptism of the Great commission, Mark 16:15-16, which involves immersion in *“water,”* Acts 8:36-39), we conclude that this promise **does not** refer to Holy Spirit baptism. Furthermore, the reciprocity of this promise is as universal as *“the remission of sins,”* suggesting to us, therefore, that it does not refer to something miraculous — unless per chance we mistakenly conclude that **all** saved people can work miracles!

Then what is the meaning of the statement, *“ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit?”* Inasmuch as “a text apart from its context becomes as pretext,” it behooves us to consider the context in order to receive the right answer. Hence, let us consider the next verse, verse 39.

Verse 39 begins with the word *“for,”* which is translated from the Greek, *Gar*. *Gar* is defined as being a conjunction, “which, according to its composition...is properly a particle of affirmation and conclusion, denoting truly therefore, verily as the case stands...” We are further informed that, by this word, *“the reason and nature of something previously mentioned are set forth..., or some previous declaration is explained, when *Gar* takes on an explicative (or explanatory, bw) force.”* (**Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon**, page 109, all underlining mine, bw).

In brief, the previous definition of *“for,”* from the Greek *gar*, shows that an explanation of a preceding statement is about to take place. Now let us read all of verses 39 and 40: *“**For** (gar) to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God **shall call** unto him. And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, **save** yourselves from this crooked generation.”*

Let us now note what we have read: (1) *“The gift of the Holy Spirit”* (v. 38) is related to the *“promise,”* v. 39. (2) The *“promise”* was directed to *“you...and to your children, and to all that are **afar off**.”* The *“you”* included the Jews to whom Peter spoke and to their *“children,”* or successive offspring. Those *“that are afar off”* are specifically described in Ephesians 2:11-12, as being Gentiles. Hence, it was a **promise** that included both Jews and Gentiles; namely, the

promise of salvation in Christ, the seed of Abraham (see Gen. 12:3; Acts 13:26-39; Gal 3:16,26-29). (3) The recipients of “*the promise*” were those whom God would “*call unto Him*.” The **Gospel** “*is the power of God unto salvation*” (Rom. 1:16), and it is through the Gospel that God **calls** sinners unto Him, 2 Thess. 2:14. (4) Therefore, “*the gift of the Holy Spirit*” includes the great Gospel blessings which the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of the word, promises unto those who **save** themselves “*from this crooked generation*” by repenting and being baptized.

A parallel passage to Acts 2:38 is Acts 3:19. Herein Peter admonished, saying “*Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins be blotted out, so that there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.*” Observe: (1) “*Repent*” in Acts 2:38 is the same as “*repent*” in Acts 2:39. (2) “*Be baptized*” in Acts 2:38 included what is involved in “*turn again*” in Acts 2:39. (3) “*Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,*” in Acts 2:38, parallels the “*seasons of refreshing*” in Acts 3:19. The Holy Spirit’s **promise** of the remission of past sins, of salvation in Christ, and the assurance of heaven for those who thus obey the gospel certainly brings “*seasons of refreshing*” to such people and cause them, like the Eunuch, to go on their “*way rejoicing,*” Acts 8:39.

Now look again to Acts 2:38. Peter said, “*Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” It is true that the Spirit, through the word (Gal. 3:2), dwells within the Christian, “*by faith,*” even as does Christ (Eph. 3:17), but Acts 2:38 must not be misconstrued to read “*ye shall receive the Holy Spirit as a gift.*” Rather, it is “*Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” “*Gift*” is the direct object of the verb “*receive.*” Hence, it is the “*gift*” that the Holy Spirit promised. But, we ask, what universal “*gift*” is promised to all who become children of God through obedience to **the Gospel** (God’s means of calling sinners,” 2 Thess. 2:14)? As Peter began that great sermon on Pentecost, he promised that “*whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,*” Acts 2:21. The sermon which followed explained what is involved in calling “*on the name of the Lord.*” Hence, from this sermon we learn that when people become believers through hearing the word of God, they must “*repent and be baptized ...in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins...*,” Acts 2:38. Those who thus obey receive “*the promise*” of verse 39, which is the **salvation** promised in verse 21. Hence, the universal “*gift*” the Holy Spirit” promised is **salvation**—salvation in Christ, wherein is salvation (2 Tim. 2:10), as well as “*all spiritual blessings*” (Eph. 1:3). Friend, have you received “*the gift of the Holy Spirit?*” Have **you** been saved? —B. Witherington
