

## Water Baptism or Holy Spirit Baptism, Which?

*“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all,”* Ephesians 4:4-6.

In the above scriptures, the apostle informs us that there is “*one baptism.*” From this reference we learn that the number of baptisms equal the number of Gods— “*one baptism*” and “*one God.*” The same could be said with reference to the “*one body*” which is “*the church*” (Col. 1:18). And the same could also be said with reference to every other “*one*” mentioned in the same text.

But John the Immerser spoke of other baptisms, saying, “*He that cometh after me shall baptize you with **the Holy Spirit, and with fire,***” Matt. 3:11. Are these separate passages of the Bible in harmony? Does the Bible contradict itself? Let us consider these particular scriptures in the light of time and circumstances.

Concerning Matthew 3:11. John was addressing a mixed audience. Some were righteous, and some were wicked. This fact is indicated by his reference to the wheat which would be gathered “*into the garner,*” and the chaff to be burned “*with unquenchable fire,*” v. 12. Because of there being two classes of people represented in the audience, John taught that certain ones would receive one baptism, and that others would receive a different baptism.

Getting more specific as to the ones who would receive Holy Spirit baptism, Jesus later said to His **apostles**, “*John truly baptized with water; but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now,*” Acts 1:5. Later in the same chapter, addressing the same ones (His apostles), Jesus further said “*You shall receive power when the **Holy Spirit** has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,*” v. 8. In the following chapter we read of this promise being fulfilled as the **apostles** “*were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance,*” Acts 2:4. Later, In Acts 10:44-47, we read of the Gentile household of Cornelius upon whom “*the gift of the Holy Spirit*” was “*poured out,*” thereby enabling them to “*speak with tongues and magnify God.*” Peter said that “*these...have received the Holy Spirit just as **we** (the apostles, bw) have,*” v. 47. Later, when Peter was explaining what had occurred with reference to the household of Cornelius, Peter said that “*the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon **us** at the beginning,*” Acts 11:15. Cornelius and his household constituted the “*them*” in this verse, and the apostles constituted the “*us.*” When he mentioned “*the beginning*” Peter referred to the day of Pentecost, when the apostles received the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit, the day when the first gospel sermon was preached, the day when 3,000 precious souls were baptized, the day “*the church*” which Jesus had promised to build came into existence. Acts 2:21-37,41,47; Matt. 16:18. According to one chronology, some ten years had passed between the events recorded in Acts 2 and Acts 10. Yet the only thing to which Peter could compare the experience of **Cornelius** and his household was that which was experienced by **the apostles** on the day of Pentecost. Hence, the records in Acts 2 and Acts 10 are the only recorded examples of people receiving Holy Spirit baptism. Represented in those cases were the Jewish and

Gentile nations, and hence we have the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy regarding God pouring out of His "*Spirit upon all flesh*," Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-20. Thus, we learn that Holy Spirit baptism was a **promise** made to certain people, and this promise has been fulfilled.

Since Jesus did not promise to the disciples, Acts 1:5) the baptism "*of fire*" which John mentioned in Matt. 3:11, we therefore conclude that the apostles did not receive the baptism of fire. Other passages associate fire with the punishment of the wicked at the end of the world, 2 Thess. 1:7-9; 2 Peter 3:7; Mark 9:43-48. Obviously, therefore, the baptism of fire in Matthew 3:11 has to do with the "*unquenchable fire*" (mentioned in v. 12), and which will be the eternal lot of the wicked at the end of the world.

Now, in our opening text (Eph. 4:4-6), written some 30 years **after** the events which occurred upon the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), Paul mentioned the "*one baptism*," which is now in effect. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not commanded of anyone. It was **promised**, and the promise has been fulfilled. The baptism of fire is awaiting the unsaved at the end of time. There remains "*one baptism*," and that is water baptism to which Paul made reference in Eph. 5:25-27, and which Peter mentioned in I Peter 3:20-21. Anyone who contends that both Holy Spirit baptism and water baptism are in effect today, is both mathematically and biblically incorrect.

Water baptism is in effect today, and those who refuse this baptism (which was not promised, but **commanded**, Acts 2:38; 10:48) are refusing that which stands between them and their sins being washed away, Acts 22:16! Consider ye well! —  
Bobby Witherington

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### **A Wonderful Audience!**

A wonderful audience is more determined by quality and attitude than by size or number. I do not know how many were present in Caesarea to hear Peter preach when he approached the house of Cornelius, but I do know that a wonderful audience had assembled together. Note that Cornelius said to Peter, "*we are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God*," Acts 10:33.

Let us consider this audience a bit more in detail: (1) They "*all*" assembled. Cornelius was not yet a Christian, but he, nevertheless, "*had called together his kinsmen and near friends*," v. 24. How many "Christians" do you know who seldom even assemble — let alone bring their "*kinsmen and near friends*?" (2) They were "*present before God*," and they recognized that fact! It is highly doubtful that their awareness of God's presence allowed much time or disposition for giggling, sleeping, note-passing, day dreaming, and clock watching. You see, they were "*before God*!" (3) They were "*present before God, to hear all things*" commanded "*of God*." This was not just an assembly of people who wanted to hear "*all things*" in general; rather they wanted to hear the "*all things...commanded of God*!" Apparently, if they had their way, Peter would have to wait for another time, place, and audience to give personal testimonials, or to talk about the latest political moves affecting the citizenry of Caesarea and Joppa. They wanted to hear things commanded "*of God*." (4) This audience was **sincere**. Their sincerity was made evident when they obeyed the gospel that Peter preached. See verses 43-48.

Occasionally the statement is made that “people are just not interested anymore.” It is true that **some** are not interested. **Some** have never been interested, and some will never be interested. However, it is a fact that there are still many today, like Cornelius, who earnestly desire the truth. What we need to do is to develop sufficient interest ourselves so as to influence others to become interested. If only we would adopt the sincere, truth-seeking, reverent attitude of Cornelius, and “*his kinsmen and near friends*,” we could figuratively turn our part of the world upside down for truth and for Christ! Cornelius was concerned about His own salvation and that of his “*kinsmen and near friends*.” Let us follow his example! —Bobby Witherington

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