

Notes on—

BAPTISM

IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

By Jack W. Langford—December, 2006

INTRODUCTION

This Bible study is not going to be a mere technical dissertation on the aspects of baptism as found in various places in the book of Acts. That is only a secondary purpose this material will serve. Rather, you will find that this study is going to be a more thorough explanation of the fundamental principle of the spiritual basis upon which Christianity has been built. The spiritual placement of every believer into Christ and into the church which is Christ's body is wonderful and beautiful in the counsels of the *Triune Godhead*. The same *Lord* Who brought this world into existence said that He would build His church (Matt. 16:18). After His ascension and being "seated at the right hand of the *Father*" (Acts 2:33 & Eph. 1:20), He began building that "Holy Temple" (Eph. 2:19-22) through the *Holy Spirit* (i.e., "the promise of the *Father*"—Acts 2:39 & Eph. 1:13), on the Day of Pentecost. The mechanism by baptism of actually creating a new congregation, plus the message of good news that continues to bring it about, plus the enthusiasm of its early adherents, is really spellbinding to lovers of Jesus Christ and His Word. My prayer is that you will enter into some of these treasures of the Word of God which was written for our encouragement and understanding.

The book of Acts is quite often resorted to by those in Christendom who want to impose a water baptismal ritual as a necessary prerequisite to obtaining salvation from the guilt and penalty of sin. I have personally had many public joint discussions in the past with certain representatives of different groups, like the so-called "Churches of Christ," the "United Pentecostals" and others over this issue. Today, however, "debating" (as they would call it) is not too popular any longer. The real reason is they have no spiritual enthusiasm. To use an old cliché, they only demonstrated they were "all wet" with religious traditionalism. The book of Acts, properly understood, actually destroys their contentions. In this study I would like to share with you many of the truths from the book of Acts which vividly demonstrate the necessity of baptism for salvation—but NOT water baptism! In this study we will find that "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" was preached from one end of the Bible to the other and never did it have a single drop of water in it. Furthermore, we will find that the "*one baptism*" that now encapsulates the Christian faith (Eph. 4:5) is the baptism which gave birth to the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4), and there was not a single drop of water in it, either. These two spiritual baptisms, the one an inward washing that has always existed, and the one that is unique to this age, have merged into "One Baptism." I believe that you will find this study helpful and strengthening to your faith.

In the mid 1960's the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church were making strides towards unity. They assigned a panel of Catholic scholars and Lutheran scholars to study, in an objective manner, the subject of baptism. The Roman Catholic scholars, led by the famous Raymond E. Brown, S.S., made the following astonishing statement: "The New Testament speaks frequently of a baptism in water as a part of the Christian life. To a certain extent, however, it is unexpected that baptism appears in Christian circles as a baptism *in water*, for a close reading of the New Testament suggests that there were indications that might have led Christians to reject a baptism in water for a less material baptism which would be understood as a baptism in the Spirit." (Lutherans & Catholics In Dialogue, II, published jointly by both groups, 1967, Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Opening Remarks, Page 11). Now this scholar shared only a few small details with the general public as to the reasons for this statement. I am going to share and demonstrate positively that "a close reading of the New Testament" proves that, through a period of transition (the book of Acts time period), the early "Christians reject(ed) a baptism in water for a less material baptism which was understood as a baptism in the Spirit." So I know you will find this study interesting and informative.

Preliminary Observations

An interesting aspect concerning the book of Acts is the fact that the human writer, Luke, was a close associate of the apostle Paul. Though Paul, as a disciple and minister of Jesus Christ, does not play a prominent role in the book of Acts until chapter thirteen, yet the spread of the gospel into the Gentile world and the move of Christianity to a position outside the Jewish Mosaic Law system to its unique posture on the world scene was primarily through Paul's agency. Furthermore it was through Paul that the very first letters were written which instruct the church of Jesus Christ in its way of life and conduct, and therefore describe that church in an intimate way to the historian looking on. Luke joined Paul in his travels on Paul's second journey (Acts 16:10-17) and on the final lap of Paul's third journey back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:5-21:18). While Paul was incarcerated in Caesarea for two years (Acts 24:27), Luke probably spent the time staying in Israel to gather firsthand material for the Gospel of Luke and for the early part of the book of Acts. Then Luke accompanied Paul (who was now a prisoner) from Caesarea all the way to Rome (Acts 27:1-28). In addition Luke always seemed to be in close proximity to Paul even till Paul's death (Col. 4:14; Philemon 24 & II Tim. 4:11). *I say all this to emphasize the fact that the historical book of Acts was written by an inspired disciple and close associate of Paul.* This may also provide a special harmony with the inspired communications that the Head of the Church gave through the apostle Paul. When we read about baptism in the book of Acts we will find that it is in perfect accord with Paul's teaching on the same subject.

Another observation that we need to make in a preliminary way is to show the different uses of the word baptism, or we can say the different kinds of baptism, as already found in Luke's earlier Gospel. Most people don't know that in the Greek world there was a tremendous variety of uses for the Greek word "*baptizo*." It could be applied to anything from plunging into water (drowning) to plunging a sword into a victim. There were literally many dozens of uses of the word. Generally it carried the idea of "dipping,

plunging, immersion, washing, purifying, to dye, stain or to totally change the condition by any action, agent or substance.” (Combined from all Lexicographers).

Now in Luke’s earlier Gospel account we will observe a wide variety of uses as well. He spoke of John’s baptism with *water*—Luke 3:7, 12, 16, 21, etc. Luke records John’s statement that the Messiah would baptize with the *Holy Spirit*—Luke 3:16. In this same passage it is also stated that Messiah would baptize with *fire*. Luke also tells us that John the Baptist preached the baptism of *repentance* for the remission of sins—Luke 3:3. Luke likewise recorded for us some of the *traditional* baptisms of the Pharisees such as being baptized (Greek—*baptizo*) before dinner, and the baptism of pots, cups and utensils—Luke 11:38. In Luke 12:50 we are informed that Christ spoke of His impending *sufferings and death* as a baptism. We know as well that Luke was very familiar with the *Mosaic Law purifications* that were likewise called baptisms—see Heb. 9:10, 13; Jn. 2:6; 3:23-25 & 11:55. So here are at least seven different ways the subject of *baptism* could be discussed in Luke’s earlier Gospel.

Therefore, the one thing this demonstrates, especially as we come to the book of Acts, is that every situation must be looked at carefully to ascertain what kind of baptism is in view in any given case. The last thing a conscientious person would want to do is to just presume some traditional idea and ignore the facts of context and application.

In this study I will attempt to explain each and every occurrence of the subject of baptism as found in the book of Acts. There have been many questions about certain ones. Thankfully, I will be following in the footsteps of other conscientious Bible teachers, whom I have known personally, who have had a sincere spiritual insight into the Scriptures being “handled properly (or rightly divided)”—II Tim. 2:15.

“The Promise of the Father” and the Overlapping of Luke 24:46-49 with Acts 1:4-8

In the last chapter of Luke and the first chapter of Acts, the Lord Jesus Christ reminded the disciples of “*the Promise of the Father*.” He had discussed this with them the night of His betrayal and arrest. This is very important because that “*Promise*” concerns the fundamental principles which will protect and guide the church. “*The promise of the Father*” is an expression that Christ used which seems to be interchangeable with the expression “*the baptism of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 1:4,5). Shortly, as we discuss just exactly what “*the Baptism of the Holy Spirit*” is, we will come back and look more carefully at “*the Promise of the Father*” in John 14, 15 & 16.

The book of Acts is simply the second phase of Luke’s documentation concerning the beginning origins of Christianity. The first phase concerned the birth and ministry of Jesus Christ as Israel’s promised Messiah. This terminated at the resurrection of Christ with His final commands to the disciples (Luke 24). The book of Acts begins with a reminder of Christ’s commands to the apostles just before His ascension. Notice the similarity of Luke 24:46-49 and Acts 1:4-8. In both cases note the importance assigned to the coming baptism of the Holy Spirit. The apostles are to preach eventually to the whole world the message of “*repentance and remission of sins*” through the redemption provided in Christ’s substitutionary death and resurrection. However, they are not to

commence this ministry until they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the gospel will, of necessity, be a Spirit indicted message. First, read Luke 24:46-49:

*“Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the **Promise of My Father** upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with **power** from on high.’”*

Now read—ACTS 1:4,5 & 8

*“And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the **Promise of the Father**, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’”*

*“...but 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.”*

On this first occasion of the mention of “baptism” in the book of Acts, we have a clear distinction being made between *water baptism* and *the baptism of the Holy Spirit*. Very few people in Christendom realize how very important this is. Since this came directly from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, we should seriously consider the meaning of it. After all, Christ did not say, “John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with MORE water!” This idea will be totally foreign, not only to this chapter but to the whole book of Acts. Christ was not instituting ANOTHER water baptism, neither here, nor in the future.

Some theologians acknowledge the fact that traditional Christendom has confused the issue of baptism in the early church by just supposing that every mention of baptism must mean water baptism. For instance the popular Charles Ryrie, in his book *Basic Theology*, bemoans this confused state. He says that this confusion makes it “more difficult to see the distinctiveness of the baptizing ministry of the Spirit in this age. But if one recognizes the body (church) as a work of God which began at Pentecost, then the necessity of the Spirit’s baptizing people into that body will be clear. Overemphasis on water baptism, particularly by immersion, often obscures or even obliterates the doctrine of Spirit baptism. If the two truths are not distinguished, usually the truth of Spirit baptism gets lost, for it is regarded simply as another way of talking about water baptism.” (Page 362, Victor Publishing).

At the very outset of the establishment of the Christian church, we are called upon to recognize that there are two very distinctive baptisms. Not only is this brought to our attention here (v. 5), but it will be emphasized again later on in the book of Acts (Acts 11:16). The one baptism is physical and it would involve man’s fleshly participation. The other baptism is spiritual and would involve man’s spiritual participation. The physical baptism is by the agent of “*water*.” The spiritual baptism is by the agent of “*the Holy*

Spirit” of God. The water baptism is identified as being that purification initiated through the ministry of John the Baptist. The spiritual baptism is identified as being that of the third Person of the Godhead Who would soon be residing personally here on earth. We should now delineate the purpose and significance of each of these two baptisms and think soberly about them. This will be important as fundamental and foundational for all future considerations given to the subject.

John’s Water Baptism

- *The purpose of John’s water baptism will be delineated under five statements:*
- 1.) Its primary purpose was to prepare a people in expectation for the coming Kingdom of Israel’s Messiah (Matt. 3:2,3). In this respect it was the “counsel of God for themselves (i.e., Israel)” (Luke 7:30).
 - 2.) In an outward physical way, it prepared the nation as a cleansing rite by ceremonial purification as was true of all purifications under the Mosaic Law (John 3:22-25 & Heb. 9:10,13). In this respect it would “fulfill all righteousness” (of the Law—Matt. 3:15).
 - 3.) As a purification rite it would also have the effect of discipling people to the Kingdom program under the leadership of the baptizer, be it John or Christ (by His disciples, John 3:26). In this respect it “made disciples” (John 4:1).
 - 4.) Also, as a cleansing, purification rite it served a spiritual purpose for teaching people the need of “repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4,5). In this respect it called upon Israel for national “repentance” (Matt. 3:1,2 & 11).
 - 5.) Also it served as the introductory rite through which Christ will be introduced directly to the nation of Israel. “That He (Christ) might be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water” (John 1:31).
- *There is no other water baptism authorized to take the place of John’s. This will be affirmed under eight statements:*
- 1.) As long as Christ will be presented as King to Israel (#1 & #5 above), and He sometimes still will be during the book of Acts period, John’s baptism is designed to be used for that purpose in a ceremonial way.
 - 2.) Christ fully authorized His apostles to perform this baptism—see John 3:22-30 & 4:1. Christ never changed or canceled this authorization, even though He did enter into a preaching ministry after John 4:1.
 - 3.) Furthermore, Christ fully endorsed John’s water baptism as God’s “counsel for them (Israel)” and this endorsement continued right up until the close of His ministry—see Luke 7:28-30 & Matt 21:25.
 - 4.) John the Baptist never predicted that Christ would institute another water baptism! He did, however, predict that Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit—see Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16 & Jn. 1:31-33.
 - 5.) Christ Himself spoke only of a spiritual baptism to come—see John 7:37-39;

14:15-18; 15:26; 16:12-15; Luke 24:49 & Acts 1:5. Furthermore, there is no indication that Mark 16:16 and Matt. 28:19 are another water baptism. They are both spiritual (see my study, *Majestic Baptism*).

- 6.) As late as Acts 11:16 the apostle Peter is still contrasting Holy Spirit baptism with John's water baptism and not with some other water baptism—because there is no other!
- 7.) John's baptism is still spoken of by Peter (Acts 10:37), by Paul (Acts 13:24), and as late as Acts 18:25 & 19:3,4 without any hint of a different water baptism to take its place.
- 8.) The practice of the Mosaic Law system continued to be observed by the Jewish believers right up till the close of the book of Acts, including its water purifications—Acts 21:23-26 & Heb. 9:10. This would include, therefore, John's water baptism because it was also for ceremonial purification.

Consequently, in the book of Acts water baptism is clearly mentioned several times. It needs to be understood that this is a continuation of John's baptism which will be mentioned almost up to the end of the Acts period. Acts records a transition out of Judaism and into pure Christianity. We will say more about this as we go along.

➤ *John's water baptism is specifically **mentioned** or indicated eight times in the book of Acts, and it is inferred in two other passages (# 3 & # 5 of this list):*

- 1.) Acts 1:5 "For John truly baptized with *water*..."
- 2.) Acts 1:22 "...from the baptism of John..."
- 3.) Acts 8:36,38 "See, here is *water*...into the *water*...he baptized him."
- 4.) Acts 10:37 "...after the baptism which John preached..."
- 5.) Acts 10:47,48 "Can any man forbid *water*...and he commanded them, In the name of the Lord, to be baptized."
- 6.) Acts 11:16 "John indeed baptized with *water*."
- 7.) Acts 13:24 "John preached a baptism of repentance."
- 8.) Acts 18:25 "...knowing only the baptism of John."
- 9.) Acts 19:3 "Into John's baptism."
- 10.) Acts 19:4 "John baptized with a baptism of repentance..."

➤ *The **important** thing to remember is that in the Gospel accounts, John's water baptism takes the **foreground** as it were on center stage, and Holy Spirit baptism takes the background and is only predicted. However, in the book of Acts Holy Spirit baptism will take the **foreground** as it were on center stage, and John's water baptism takes the background and is fading away.*

We will now come to an examination of Holy Spirit baptism and we will endeavor to give a clear Scriptural explanation.

Holy Spirit Baptism— As seen by John the Baptist

An explanation of Holy Spirit baptism is in order. When John the Baptist predicted Holy Spirit baptism (as we noted earlier) he described it, along with a fire baptism, in the context of an illustration of a great harvest scene (Matt. 3:10-12). Two things, therefore, would happen. As the harvesters would reap, they would “gather the wheat (the believers) into the barns.” The “wheat” represents the children of the Kingdom. The “barns” in John’s statement had reference to the Kingdom. The gathering of the wheat into the barns represents the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” The “chaff,” on the other hand, would also be gathered into bundles to be burned. The “chaff” represents the unbelievers. Their gathering to be burned will be their “baptism by fire.” This had reference to their placement in hellfire.

John the Baptist had clearly prophesied that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist knew nothing about the church of Jesus Christ which was a “mystery” not known in past ages (Eph. 3:1-7). Therefore, his conception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was that which had been given by the Hebrew prophets (Isa. 32:15; Isa. 44:3; Ezek. 36:25-33; 39:29 & Joel 2:28). Even though national Israel rejected the promised Messiah and His Kingdom, nevertheless, God would not allow John’s prophecy to fall to the ground as if unfulfilled. Consequently, “the Promise of the Father” which Christ revealed to the disciples was the particular “baptism of the Holy Spirit” which occurred on the Day of Pentecost. “That Spirit” which was manifested at Pentecost was that spoken of by the prophet Joel. However, the baptism of the Holy Spirit that took place on Pentecost is unique for this age and created an entirely new company of people, separate and distinct from all the rest of Israel.

As Spoken of by Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ clearly predicted that in the coming age the true worship of God would be spiritual in nature and not physical. This is in perfect keeping with the two distinct baptisms—one physical and one spiritual. Christ said “*The hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father...But the hour is coming, and now is, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:21-24).

Christ made further reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 7. He also indicated that it would be a great blessing which would burst forth from the instant of a person’s coming to Him for salvation; “*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*’ *But this he spoke concerning the Spirit, Whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*” (John 7:37-39). The coming of the Holy Spirit first took place on the Day of Pentecost. After that, every time a repentant person believed on Christ he would instantly receive the Holy Spirit (the baptism of the Spirit) as well.

In addition, and in a more careful way, Christ explained many things that would happen when “*the Promise of the Father*” would be fulfilled. This is given in John 14:16-18 & 26; 15:26 & 16:7-14. Christ’s words are, “*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper (14:16)...But the Helper (Comforter, in KJV), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name (14:26) ...But when the Helper comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth Who proceeds from the Father (15:26)...” And then compared with Acts 1:4,5—“wait for *the Promise of the Father*, which He said, ‘you have heard from Me...you shall be **baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now.’” We will list some of the more obvious things that will happen when “the Promise of the Father” (the baptism of the Holy Spirit) is come:*

- 1.) The Holy Spirit is the “Helper or Comforter” Who stands by each believer (Jn.14:16).
- 2.) The Holy Spirit will minister “truth” to the believer (Jn. 14:17).
- 3.) By means of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling the believer, the Father and the Son will also make their abode with the believer (Jn. 14:23).
- 4.) The Holy Spirit will “teach” the believer the things of Christ and bring to remembrance things of the past (Jn. 14:26 & 15:26).
- 5.) Christ will be especially present in the believer (Jn. 14:18 & 28).
- 6.) The Holy Spirit will guide the saints into “all truth” and minister the things of Christ yet to come (Jn. 16:13).
- 7.) The Holy Spirit, probably primarily through the believer, will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment to come (Jn. 16:8-11).

From all these passages spoken by Christ, and summarized as “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4,5), we can gather that Holy Spirit baptism will accomplish many things. It will minister to the penitent believers the immediate wellspring of salvation, with an abundance of blessings and joy. It will place them into Christ, collectively embodying the church and ministering the things of Christ to the church. Holy Spirit baptism will totally characterize Christianity.

As Spoken of by the Apostle Paul

What Christ said in John is similar in nature to the extended explanation revealed through the apostle Paul. Note especially the following passages:

*“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is **Christ**. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into **one body**, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to **drink into one Spirit**” (I Cor. 12:12,13).*

*“For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on **Christ**. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all **One in Christ Jesus**’ (Gal. 3:27,28).*

*“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into **Christ Jesus** were baptized into **His death**? Therefore we were buried with Him through **baptism into death**, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in **newness of life**...Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but **alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord**” (Rom. 6:3-11).*

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who **blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ**” (Eph. 1:3).*

*“In Him (Christ) you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in Whom also, having believed, you were sealed with **the Holy Spirit of Promise** (i.e., the baptism of the Holy Spirit)” (Eph. 1:13 & Gal. 3:14).*

Now all these passages together agree to tell us that Holy Spirit baptism is the Grand Incorporating Baptism. It incorporates us into Christ, and into Christ's body, the church. In addition it conveys to us all spiritual blessings in Christ, beginning with our emersion into Christ's death, and then into His life and body. This singular baptism summarizes and seals our total position in Christ for this age or dispensation of Grace.

In this regard, Holy Spirit baptism is like the controlling program on a computer. One cannot operate a computer with all its various and intricate programs without a *singular operating program*. Old computers have old operating systems and new computers have new and better *controlling programs*. I happen to have the Microsoft Windows XP program on my computer. The operating program controls all other programs on that computer. It does not do one specific job other than controlling all the other programs. So it is with Holy Spirit baptism. It does not specifically save us, but it controls the operation that does save us. It is not the blessing that blesses us, but it ministers to us the blessings. It is not Christ or His body, but it primarily places us into Christ and into His body. In summary, Holy Spirit baptism is the God-ordained controlling influence creating and operating the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

ACTS 2:1-4

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind (The Holy Spirit of God), and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as a fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).

One moment there was nothing more than a group of Jewish brethren praying together. The next instant the church which is Christ's body came suddenly into existence. This was a whole new organization that never existed before. One moment

they were only Jews by race and religion and the next moment they became a new species on earth—with a special relationship to Jesus Christ that made them collectively a “New Man” (Eph. 2:15). They would learn later that in this new creation “*there is neither Jew nor Gentile but one new man.*” These believers were already personally saved. The baptism of the Holy Spirit that took place did not save them, but it placed them into a new and unique body—the church which is Christ’s body. Henceforth, whenever a repentant sinner calls upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ for personal soul salvation, the very instant he places his faith in Christ (as we read in Ephesians 1:13), he will be baptized by the Holy Spirit of God into Christ and into Christ’s body and there will be made available to him all spiritual blessings in Christ.

In the case of the saints on this Pentecost, the immediate manifestation of their being baptized by the Holy Spirit was their “filling with the Spirit” and their “speaking in tongues.” They would go on in their lives being “filled with the Holy Spirit” on different occasions. Many of them would also continue to speak in the miraculous gift of “tongues” in the future. “Tongues” and being “filled” is not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but only two of its many manifestations. The manifestations, especially the “fruit of the Spirit,” will last the lifetime of every saint.

What happened here was the fulfillment of Christ’s words that He would send “*The Promise of the Father—baptized with the Holy Spirit*” (Luke 24:49 & Acts 1:4,5).

These believing Jews became a new body of believers in Jesus Christ, divinely united by the Holy Spirit. At that time they would still find common ties with all their Jewish brethren in the continued observance of the Law of Moses, the celebration of the Feast Days, and the sacrificial system. However, they were completely set apart by their faith in Christ and by their special indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God. The other Jews looked upon them almost with envy because of their joy and enthusiasm through the Spirit. In addition there was an abundance of miraculous manifestations attesting to the validity of their faith in Christ Jesus.

So, the baptism of the Holy Spirit became the singular most important event in the book of Acts. From then on Luke was primarily recording the works or Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and disciples. In fact, some Bible teachers strongly recommend that the book of Acts should more properly be named, “The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Disciples.” Not only is the baptism of the Holy Spirit the primary event in the book of Acts, but it is also the primary baptism that will be spoken of throughout the rest of the book. It not only marks “the beginning” (Acts 11:15) of the church, but it also marks the “new” character (Eph. 2:15; II Cor. 5:17) of the church.

Actually, water baptism would become incidental to this greater baptism, and would only be mentioned on incidental occasions. Much like circumcision, head-shaving, feast observance, and Temple worship, water baptism would still be talked about and practiced, but only circumstantially. The “New Wine” (Matt. 9:17) of the greater spiritual baptism would be the primary drink of the New Age. As Christ turned the water of Jewish purifications into the life giving drink (John 2:1-11)—so it is for the New Age.

John’s water baptism was the last water purification instituted for the nation of Israel. It would NOT be replaced with another water baptism! Therefore, all the instances of water baptism mentioned in Acts are simply John’s water baptism. The other mentions

of baptism are to be understood as spiritual and the characteristic baptism of Christianity. Since the baptism of the Holy Spirit was the inauguration for a new age or dispensation in God's dealing with mankind, we will repeatedly see the spiritual baptism in view as descriptive of the new converts. Thus the very first occurrence of "baptism" in the book of Acts was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now for the second occurrence of "baptism."

ACTS 2:38,39 & 41

*"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be **baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; and you shall receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit**. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call.'"*

*"Then those who gladly received his word were **baptized**; and that day about three thousand souls **were added to them**."*

What some people have done with this passage is quite interesting. Those who believe in "baptismal regeneration" take it as being **water** baptism that brings "remission of sins." On the other hand, groups like the Baptists who do not believe in "baptismal regeneration" take it to mean that these people get **water** baptized *because* of their "remission of sins," meaning they are demonstrating that fact by their water baptism. Both of these representative groups forget all about the fact that there is absolutely no "**water**" mentioned at all, neither in the verses nor in the context.

An older well-known book in its day was entitled, "The Doctrine of Baptism" by George D. Armstrong of Virginia (1857). He made a very accurate statement, "Where a word, such as baptize, is used in two senses—one spiritual, and the other external and material—the tendency of religious formalism is ever to substitute the latter sense for the former; and this for the reason, that a 'manipulated religion' suits well the pride of the natural heart. Abundant proof of this remark, will at once, suggest itself to every student of ecclesiastical history" (pg. 128). A warning like this is very appropriate when we look carefully at these particular verses. The agent effecting this baptism is specified, and it is NOT water, but "*Repentance*." The resulted condition or element of the immersion is the "*remission of sins*" and this is NOT water, either! Now the ritualists in religion entirely ignore this and say, "when the Bible says baptism is for the remission of sins, I believe what it says, and take it literally!" I respond to this by saying, "I take it literally also, and I believe in precisely what it says!" Furthermore we are not left to our "guesses" because it clearly identifies "*Repentance*" as the agent that baptizes us "*into*" the element—"the remission of sins."

When one reads the passage and takes it literally, it becomes very clear that it could not possibly be "water" baptism. The only sin water baptism ever took away was ceremonial uncleanness of the flesh—Hebrews 9:10 & 13. "The various *baptisms*" (literal trans. of verse 10) "*sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh*" (verse 13). All interpreters of this passage in Acts 2 agree on one thing, the apostle Peter is not talking about the remission of ceremonial sins of the flesh. We all can agree it is talking about the real sins of the soul. Now to take away those kinds of sins requires, on the face of it, **a spiritual transaction**. "Sins of the soul" are not physical. To remit the sins of the soul

requires a *spiritual cleansing or washing*, and that is precisely what this baptism provides. In fact, a careful look at the Greek pronoun used, *eis*, literally means “into the remission of sins.” In other words, taken literally and at face value, this baptism is “into the remission of sins,” (not *into* water). It actually places one *into* a condition of total spiritual cleansing of sins of the soul. No wonder “water” is never mentioned—it is not a water baptism, but a spiritual baptism effected by a repentant attitude of heart.

How were people saved under Christ’s ministry?

Usually those who take the position that Acts 2:38 is water baptism for salvation, also take the position that people were saved before Acts by John’s water baptism. They would only observe that Acts 2:38 is a new water baptism ordered by Christ for salvation in the new age. This is totally unbiblical and ignores all the various incidents of salvation under Christ’s ministry. In the Book of Hebrews we are given an important statement about the plan of salvation in this Christian era. Here it is, “*How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him?*” (Heb. 2:3). This makes it clear that the salvation plan preached for that generation, continuing during the book of Acts and up until the book of Hebrews was written, was “FIRST” proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself. And it did not change after the Day of Pentecost to something else. Therefore when we look into the Gospels, we will see it exemplified. Two factors will become apparent. First there was plenty of water baptism around, but it was never used for the spiritual soul salvation of anybody. The people that were saved under Christ’s ministry were saved by faith without works, and certainly without the need of getting water baptized. Notice the following examples, and actually each of these examples is a spectacular study, which we do not have time to explore at this moment.

1.) “And He said to her, your sins are forgiven...your faith has saved you; go in peace” (Luke 7:48-50) [*No water baptism*]. 2.) “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the sick of the palsy, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you’” (Mark 2:5) [*No water baptism*]. 3.) “This day has salvation come to this house...for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9,10) [*No water baptism*]. 4.) “And Jesus said to her, ‘neither do I condemn you: go and sin no more’” (John 8:11) [*No water baptism*]. 5.) “Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him...and many more believed because of His own words; and they said to the woman, ‘now we believe, not because of your saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is the Savior of the world’” (John 4:39-42) [*No water baptism*]. 6.) “And the publican, standing far off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:13,14) [*No water baptism*]. 7.) “Jesus...said to him, ‘do you believe in the Son of God?’ ...And Jesus said to him, ‘you have both seen Him and it is He Who is talking with you.’ Then he answered, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him” (John 9:35-38) [*No water baptism*]. 8.) “And he said to Jesus, ‘Lord remember me when You come into Your Kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you shall be with Me in paradise’” (Luke 23:42,43) [*No water baptism*]. Etc., etc., etc. Did all these people obey from their hearts the form of doctrine delivered to them? Of course they did!

When we come to Acts 2:38 we shall see that the terms of salvation have not changed with the apostles. Salvation is still the gift of God. It is still based upon repentance from sins and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For that generation Christ set the pattern. The apostles still gave the same basic message. In fact, Peter will not be giving a new message. He will simply be giving the same message as Christ, with the emphasis now upon Christ's death and resurrection as the accomplished basis for that salvation (see my study, *Salvation-Baptism Basics*).

Review of what has happened

When the first group of disciples had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit earlier that morning, miraculous signs immediately followed. Many thousands of Jews who were in the Temple area that morning witnessed the phenomena of—the rushing mighty wind, the flames as of fire, the filling of the disciples of Christ and the miraculous gift of tongues. Whenever any of them would speak in a tongue, all in the crowd from different nations would understand them in their own languages. This was a notable miracle. When Peter stopped speaking in a miraculous tongue, he turned to the audience and lifted up his voice and told that generation that the Messiah Whom they had rejected was gloriously resurrected from the dead. He gave Scriptures to prove it. Peter spoke a burning indictment to their very hearts. Hundreds in the audience could not resist the power of Peter's message and were convicted in their hearts. They cried out to Peter as to what they should do. If you think for one moment that Peter told them to go and jump into one of the many Jewish water baptistries which were scattered around the Temple area, they would certainly be in for a mighty letdown after such a dramatic message. The only baptistries available were the purification baths situated around the Temple area, and there were plenty of them. I have personally seen a few of them. However, to get into those would only identify the new converts with Judaism's purifications.

Let me assure you, these people were not told to go and line up around the Jewish baptistries. The baptism Peter was talking about was as dynamic as was his message. It was the real genuine article that could take away the sins of the soul.

Sad to say, as we indicated earlier, when most Christians today hear the word "baptism," they automatically think "splash." This is purely due to many centuries of ritual tradition in Christendom. There are many kinds of baptisms spoken of in the Scriptures, and water baptism is just one of them. Many times the prophets and apostles and Christ, Himself, spoke of the inward baptism of the soul, which is spiritual.

Peter was not giving something new!

Now actually, this interpretation should not surprise anyone. It is repeatedly spoken of throughout the Scriptures. Peter is not saying anything new! Let me give you a few examples of where repentance brings about a spiritual washing—

The Psalmist of old, even before the prophets, spoke of his personal cleansing of heart in the following manner. *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgression. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For*

I acknowledged my transgressions, and my sin is always before me...Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow” (Psalm 51:1-7). This is nearly 1000 years before Peter spoke.

Isaiah the prophet calls the nation of Israel to repentance in the very first chapter of his book. First, Isaiah expresses contempt upon the ritual sacrificial system offered by hypocrites. Then he calls upon Israel to “**wash yourselves, make yourselves clean: put away the evil of your doings...Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord, Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool**” (Isa. 1:16-18). There is not an interpreter of this sacred passage, be he Jew or Gentile, who does not recognize that Isaiah is calling for repentance that will effect a spiritual “washing” and “cleansing” that will take away the sins of the soul. This is some 700 years before Peter’s message.

Listen now to Jeremiah, likewise, call upon Israel to repentance. He, too, first expresses contempt for any ritual cleansing that could take away sins, “*For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me, says the Lord God*” (Jer. 2:22). And then Jeremiah cries out, “*O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?*” (Jer.4:14). This is nearly 600 years before Peter’s message.

The so-called “early Church fathers” read all these passages from the Old Testament in the Greek Septuagint and referred to them as “*The baptism of Isaiah,*” and “*the baptism of Jeremiah,*” and “*the baptism of David.*” And no one ever thought of interpreting them as referring to a physical ritual water baptism. That interpretation would be stupid and foolish. All spoke of a spiritual cleansing, not a physical one.

John the Baptist as a prophet was no different. He practiced a ritual water baptism in preparation for the coming Messiah. However, the real baptism he preached was like Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s and David’s—“*The baptism of REPENTANCE for (into) the remission of sins*” (Mark 1:4). And this is exactly what Peter was saying, “*REPENT and be baptized, into the remission of sins.*” What water does is only outward and ceremonial. What “repentance” does is inward, spiritual and REAL.

In a similar vein, the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, right in the middle of the Pharisees talking about their ritual “*baptisms*” for outward purification, told them what they really needed was the inward cleansing of their hearts. “*Then the Scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus saying, ‘Why do your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread’ (Matt.15:1,2)...And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He (Christ) had not first baptized before dinner (Luke. 11:38)...For the Pharisees and all the Jews, except they baptize themselves, they do not eat...and practice the baptism of cups, and pots, and brazen vessels, and couches (Mark 7:4)...And the Lord said to him, ‘Now do you Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. You fools, did not He, that made that which is outside, make that which is inside also?’ (Luke 11:39,40)...This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me...That which comes out of the man is what defiles him. For from within out of the heart of man, proceeds evil...and defiles the man (Mark 7:6, 20-23)...Thou blind Pharisee, clean first that which is within...and the outside will be clean as well’” (Matt. 23:25,26).*

Now all these five persons have given ample testimony, and there is much more that could be given, that the only **baptism** which could remit sins was inward and **spiritual**. In fact, three of these witnesses, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Christ, actually ridiculed the outward ritual baptisms that only purified the flesh but could not cleanse the sins of the soul. Obviously, Peter is not talking about a ritual baptism, but the real baptism!

Consequently, the agent of the baptism of Acts 2:38 is “repentance” and it is inward and spiritual and brings, positively, “the remission of sins.” This baptism is not dispensational. It has always existed and still exists today in this Age of Grace. And as far as I know, it will continue to exist in the coming Millennial Kingdom. Like I said, Peter was not preaching something new. Isaiah preached it! Jeremiah preached it! David preached it! John preached it! Christ preached it! And now Peter preaches the very same thing. Religionists will swear up and down that *this time* it must be W-A-T-E-R! They will bore two miles deep (by means of human reasoning and tradition) into this verse and still will not come up with any water! Acts 2:38 is a “dry well,” yet overflowing with real cleansing power! The only thing new about this passage is that the remission of sins is now openly proclaimed in “*the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

A Spiritual washing, in the name of Jesus Christ!

No Bible student should have any trouble whatsoever in knowing what kind of a baptism takes away sins. All must admit, a spiritual transaction took place involving the remission of sins. Sins are not dirt on the body, but are inward and of the heart. The cleansing of these sins is positively and unmistakably a spiritual transaction. This transaction is called a baptism. Of necessity the baptism must likewise be inward and spiritually cleansing the heart. In confirmation of this simple deduction we have the inspired words of the apostle Paul to add to that of Christ, John, Jeremiah, Isaiah and David. To the whole Corinthian assembly Paul said, “But you are WASHED...in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by THE SPIRIT OF OUR GOD” (I Cor. 6:11).

A classic treatise on the subject of Baptism was done by James W. Dale in the 1880’s. He was endorsed by a veritable galaxy of reputable scholars—Strong, Young, Thayer, Philip Schaff, Moffat, Shedd, Albert Barnes, etc., etc. In his third volume, “Johanic Baptism” (pg. 248, 249), he made this statement, “Under Judaism rite and ceremony had a prime importance. It was by and through them truth was reached. Under Christianity truth is brought to the foreground and directly taught; while the observance of ritual, as such, is not taught at all by Christianity. Ritual observance never appears but as a shadow of truth, and by itself is worthless as a shadow.” Now think about this statement. The water baptism rite that John the Baptist practiced was to “manifest Christ to Israel.” That which “manifests” something is not the real thing itself. It only stands as a pointer or sign directing our attention to the real object. Christ was the object that John’s water baptism pointed to. How did it do that? John answers by proclaiming, after the baptism of Christ, “Behold the lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John’s purification rite only pointed to the Great Purifier of men’s souls. John’s rite was ceremonial—whereas Christ as “the Lamb” would actually take away the sins of the world. The Lamb does what the rite could not possible do. No water baptism could ever take away the sins of the world, nor of a single person. What the ritual would do only in type or ceremony, the Savior could do in reality. And the work of this later

baptizer is what the book of Acts is all about! For obtaining the remission of sins we should never place our faith in a *ritual*, but in the *reality*!

Important addition

In addition, at the outset of this new dispensation we have already been told that a new and unique baptism would characterize the Age—“the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” This is the baptism that would be the controlling influence upon all spiritual blessing in Christ. This baptism would therefore create and build the church by placing all believers into Christ, into His death, burial and resurrection, and into His one body, the church.

Therefore, Peter adds a very important statement: “—and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **For the Promise (the baptism of the Holy Spirit) is unto you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call**” (Acts 2:38,39). This is the great controlling influence that will apply the remission of sins as well as place the believer into Christ and the church—the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Here is where two spiritual baptisms become “One.” The ageless inward baptism for remission of sins is now incorporated by Holy Spirit baptism into “one baptism.” Remember the illustration of the controlling program for our computers. Any one of the individual programs can be spoken of separately as to each individual job. However, collectively we can speak of our computer operation under the overall controlling program. Now any illustration may have its drawbacks. Nevertheless, what Peter is saying here is that these repentant souls will now come under the greater influence of a new program—Holy Spirit baptism.

Consequently, the summary statement: “*Then those who gladly received his word were **baptized**; and that day about three thousand souls were **added to them***” (Acts 2: 41), must be the baptism that “**adds**” to the church, and is “**the Promise**” (v. 39) of the Father. This is the baptism that will place every true heart believer “INTO CHRIST” and “into Christ’s body.” This is the “baptism” that will most often be spoken of in Acts as stating the conversion of those who repent and believe the gospel message.

ACTS 3:19

Though Acts 3:19 does not use the word “baptism,” it says the same thing. “*Repent therefore and be **converted**, that your **sins may be blotted out**, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*”

Just a short time after the events of Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached a similar message of repentance and remission of sins. Instead of the words “be baptized” he said, “be converted.” The identical result is obtained by similar words. To be baptized is to be converted. To be converted is to be baptized. The Greek word is *epistrepho* which means “to turn about” (Matt. 13:15; Lk. 22:32 & James 5:19,20).

Thayer, in his classical Greek-English Lexicon, which is still a standard today, says on the definition of *baptizo*, “see especially Dale’s works.” Dale in his monumental and encyclopedic work on baptism as used in the Grecian world, gave a basic definition of baptism as simply, “A CHANGED CONDITION.” Dale said, “The master key to the interpretation of baptism is CONDITION, condition characterized by completeness with

or without physical envelopment.” He placed this definition over against the traditional concepts of dipping in water. He said further, “Whatever is capable of thoroughly changing the character, state, or condition of any subject, is capable of baptizing that object; and by such change of character, state, or condition does, in fact, baptize it.” (Classical Baptism, page 354). He gave this definition in light of a thorough study of its use in the Grecian world. Lexical authorities endorsed Dale’s basic definition. Beecher (a theologian of prominence at that time) summarized Dale’s contribution to the definition of baptism by saying, “Christian baptism is a thoroughly changed condition of the soul effected by the Holy Spirit through the efficacy of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.”

The truth given by Dale is clearly born out in this passage of Scripture where baptism (a changed condition) and conversion (to turn about) bring the same results—namely, the remission of sins and immersion into Christ. The word “conversion” simply implies “a changed condition” (baptism). And, as was true in Peter’s first message when he spoke about “the remission of sins,” there is no water involved.

ACTS 8:12, 13 & 15-17

*“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were **baptized**. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was **baptized** he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.”*

*“...prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He (the Holy Spirit) had fallen upon none of them. They had only been **baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”*

When we come to Acts the eighth chapter, and the passage dealing with the conversion of the Samaritans, we find an area that many consider very difficult to understand and harmonize with the rest of the book. Many have taken the position that this is an exceptional case concerning salvation and baptism. I must admit that I stumbled over the passage for several years. However, I believe I understand it now and can share that understanding with others. Some of the questions that surrounded this passage were: What was the exact message given to the Samaritans? What kind of baptism is in view—was it water or Spirit baptism? Was Simon the sorcerer really saved? What does it mean that the apostles conveyed the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands? And what does it mean to “receive the Holy Spirit?”

The Evangelization of the Samaritans

As we may remember, Christ told the disciples just before His ascension, that they “shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Now the gospel message is going to be opened up to the Samaritans. Luke 24:47 tells us what they were to be witnesses of—“that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” This is essentially the gospel message.

Up till this point in time, most of the testimony about Christ was centered around Jerusalem and Judea. Then a severe persecution broke out, spearheaded by an energetic and zealous young Pharisee named Saul. Consequently, many of the brethren were scattered and “went everywhere preaching (evangelizing) the Word” (Acts 8:4). In verse five of this chapter we are told that Philip went to “the city of Samaria and preached (proclaimed) Christ to them.” In accordance with Christ’s command they would be proclaiming “repentance and remission of sins” in Christ’s name. This is what Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and thereafter and, no doubt, this is exactly what Philip was preaching. The message has not changed. The word *evangelized* is used five times in this chapter and it has reference to the good news of salvation in Christ (Acts 8:4,12, 25, 35 & 40). This is the verb form of the word *gospel or glad tidings*. In Acts 5:42 we were told that the disciples “ceased not to teach and preach (literally, *evangelize*) Jesus Christ.” Now this is the same thing Philip was doing in this city of Samaria. Philip is only going to do in Samaria what had already been done in Jerusalem and Judea.

In verse 12 of this 8th chapter of Acts we are told that the Samaritans “*believed Philip as he preached (evangelized) the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ...*” Some have thought that perhaps the subject of “the kingdom of God” would not necessarily convey the gospel of personal salvation. It is true that, prior to the death of Christ, when the apostles preached the kingdom of God to the nation of Israel they did not lay emphasis upon the death of Christ or His resurrection. In fact, when they were first told of His sufferings and death, Peter didn’t believe it (Matt 16:21-23). However, in the case at hand of Philip preaching to the Samaritans, it is after the fact of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. The message of the kingdom is now based squarely on the truth of Christ’s death and resurrection. Therefore, it is unthinkable that the benefits of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection would not be a vital part of the gospel message. Actually the truth of Israel’s long hoped for kingdom would only be enhanced by the message of Christ’s substitutionary death, burial and resurrection. No one could enter the kingdom without being “born again” (John 3:3) by faith in Christ. And now they would have a tremendous encouragement to place their faith in the Savior. So we have every reason to believe that Philip preached “repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ...in Samaria” (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8 and Acts 8:4, 12), even in the context of the kingdom of God. This should answer the question of just exactly what was preached to the Samaritans—it was the good news of repentance and remission of sins by faith in Jesus Christ, the resurrected King of Israel.

The conversion or baptism of the Samaritans

In addition to Philip preaching to them the good news of Christ, God allowed many special miracles to occur through Philip, all of which enhanced and confirmed to the Samaritans the reality of the message. There resulted “great joy” in that city (v. 8). The text says that when they believed the message Philip preached “*both men and women were baptized*” (v. 12). In addition this included the “*baptism*” (v. 13) of Simon who had practiced sorcery in the city for a long time, and was considered a “great power of God” up until this time. The statement about their “baptism” is presented as a spontaneous thing. There is no indication that they needed to look around for some kind of a baptistry—“water” is not mentioned.

Actually we will see all the same ingredients in the situation here in Samaria as is expressed by the words of the Lord Jesus in Mark 16:15-17. Christ had said, “Go you into all the world, and **preach the gospel**^o to every creature. He that **believes**¹ and is **baptized**² shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned, and **these signs**³ shall follow those that believe...”

And this is precisely what happened in Samaria: “**Philip preached unto them Jesus**^o...(and) they **believed**¹...and they were **baptized**²... and wondered, beholding the **miracles and signs**³...”

In other words, the evangelization of the Samaritans is a very vivid example of the commission of Mark 16:16,17. There is not a drop of water in Mark 16:16,17, nor is there in these statements concerning the Samaritans. We had best, therefore, also leave water out. The statements of their “baptism” are statements of their spiritual placement into Christ and into His body, the church. It is just like the statement in Acts 2:41, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized.” It is also similar in nature to the statement in Acts 18:8, “And **many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.**” One reason why we know this was not a water baptism for the Corinthians is because Paul would indicate in his epistle to them that **very few** of them (Jews) had been water baptized (I Cor. 1:14-16).

This answers the question as to what kind of baptism is indicated in the text. It was the same spiritual baptism that characterized the first converts on the Day of Pentecost. We will enhance this conclusion as we answer the other questions.

It is important to take note of the arrival of the apostles, Peter and John, in Samaria. They were sent there for a purpose (v. 14). The Samaritans were considered by the Jewish people to be “apostates” and only a mixed people with part Jewish blood and part pagan blood. Their religion was a mixture of Mosaic Law with pagan formalities. The Jewish people usually stayed away from the Samaritans. Christ, Himself, had preached there in spite of the Jewish ostracism (John 4:9, 39-42) and many were saved already. As we discussed before, those saved under Christ’s ministry were obviously saved without the instrumentality of water baptism. The same will be true in this case. Now under Philip’s ministry when they professed faith in the Jewish Messiah as their Savior and Lord, it is appropriate for the Samaritans to recognize the authority of the Jewish apostles of Jesus Christ, who were duly authorized by Christ as leaders in the new community of believers in the Christ Who was put to death, yet resurrected.

Was Simon the Sorcerer really saved?

There is sufficient reason to doubt Simon’s salvation by the thing he does after his conversion. This doubt, however, is counterbalanced by other factors. Simon’s problem was unique because he was an outstanding, almost miraculous, religious leader in the community before Philip’s arrival. People could not comprehend his tricks of hand other than by assigning to him some divine power. No doubt Simon reveled in such attention—and now all of that was gone. Simon had marveled at the miracles Philip performed by the real power of God, because Simon, himself, knew the difference from what he had been doing by trickery. Therefore, Simon also was said to “*believe and was baptized*”

(8:13). Simon was no longer in the foreground but rather in the background. He had lost all his prestige. No doubt, his temptation was to regain his former position.

When the apostles arrived, the first thing they did was to pray for the people that they might receive the Holy Spirit (as we shall discuss shortly, this receiving of the Spirit was for the miraculous gifts of the Spirit), *“For as yet He was fallen upon none of them...Then they laid hands on them that they might receive the Holy Spirit”* (vs. 15-17). When Simon saw that through the laying on of the hands of the apostles the people received the Holy Spirit, he offered them money that he might also have that ability (vs.18,19). Peter’s words to Simon were a very strong indictment:

“Your money perish with you, because you thought the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.”

If Simon were a true believer in Christ, and baptized into Christ, then actually Peter’s words were consistent with that fact. Peter did not tell him he needed to get saved. Peter did not give him the gospel, but actually treated him as a very carnal brother who needed to be disciplined for his wicked thoughts of pride. Please remember that two Christians had just dropped dead at Peter’s feet for the sin of lying before the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). They literally perished physically, and this is really the same thing Peter is saying to Simon, *“Thy money perish with you.”* That is physical disciplinary death. That does not mean Ananias and Sapphira went to hell, nor does it mean that Simon would go to hell. It is talking about physical discipline. And there is no indication that Simon died like Ananias and Sapphira. So there is really not sufficient evidence that Simon was not a true believer who was really baptized into Christ.

Another sorcerer who, no doubt, was unsaved and is a close illustration for comparison, is a man who in a similar way used the magic arts to confuse people and win acclaim to himself. This was the sorcerer the apostle Paul met. However, in the case of this sorcerer named Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6-12), he actually tried to turn people away from the faith. Now Simon did not do this. Simon professed to embrace the faith, yet simply wanted to regain his prestige back, and Peter had the spiritual insight to recognize this.

What does it mean to receive the Spirit by the laying on of hands?

As we noted earlier, the apostles, Peter and John, were sent down to Samaria by the church at Jerusalem. When they came they are said to have *“laid their hands upon them”* that they might *“receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He was fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”* (vs. 15-17). This has caused a lot of people to question what exactly does it mean that they had received the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the apostle’s hands? And it is also asked, was this “receiving of the Holy Spirit” the same as “Holy Spirit baptism?”

In answer to these questions there are two, possible three, things to remember.

No. 1. “Holy Spirit baptism,” or being “born of the Spirit,” or the spiritual “remission of sins,” is never obtained by “the laying on of hands of anybody.” These only

come straight from God in heaven the moment God sees the true heart attitude of the penitent person exercising faith in Christ. On the other hand, the miraculous gifts and manifestations of the Spirit are often received by the “laying on of hands.” And this is really what is in view here with the Samaritans. They had been baptized by the Spirit, but they had not received any of the “manifestations of the Spirit.” We are told in 1 Cor.12:7 that “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man for the profit of all.” These were the miraculous gifts of the Spirit such as tongues, interpretations, miracles, healings, prophecy, etc. These manifestations happened on Pentecost automatically. They also happened with the first Gentile converts automatically (Acts 10). However, in other cases, they did not happen automatically. In Acts 19:6 Paul had to lay his hands upon the disciples in order for them to receive the Spirit for the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. That is precisely what happened here with the Samaritans.

No. 2. In Hebrews 6:2, we read about “the doctrine of the laying on of hands.” When one follows the subject through the Scriptures, it will always mean the conveying or transferring of some power, gift or prophecy, from one party to another. When the people laid their hands on the head of the sacrifices and confessed their sins, it meant the transfer of their sins to the animal. The Patriarchs laid hands on their grandsons and conveyed prophetic promises (Gen.48:13,14). Hands were laid upon men in consecration into their offices (Num. 8:10 & Acts 6:6), upon people for healing (Mk. 5:23), to bless the children (Matt. 19:13), for special gifts (II Tim. 1:6 & I Tim. 4:14) and for the miraculous gifts as in Acts 19:6. I say again, never it is stated that salvation, the new birth, or Holy Spirit baptism is ever conveyed by the laying on of hands.

No. 3. What does it mean to “*receive the Spirit?*” It is true that sometimes the expression indicates the receiving of the Spirit for salvation (John 7:39 & Acts 2:38). However, it is also used in other ways. Actually it can mean any one of several things. In John 20:22, we are told that Christ “*breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive you the Spirit,’*” and Christ proceeded to give them special instructions. In this case their receiving of the Spirit meant for enlightenment or understanding—“*He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles*” (Acts 1:2). In Acts 4:31, the Holy Spirit came upon and filled the disciples for “*speaking the word with boldness.*” As we stated earlier, in Acts 19:6 the “*Holy Spirit came upon*” the new disciples for the miraculous gifts. In addition, the Spirit came upon them by the laying on of Paul’s hands just exactly as was done for the Samaritans. No doubt, this was the same situation with the Samaritans because whatever happened to them when they “*received the Spirit,*” Simon could see and realize as outward manifestations. This “receiving of the Spirit” is the same as “the spirit falling upon them” for the miraculous manifestations.

Thus, I hope I have sufficiently answered the many questions centered around the conversion of the Samaritans.

ACTS 8:36-39

“Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ [Then Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus

Christ is the Son of God.’] So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

Many people who see water baptism, such as the one before us in this account, will immediately relegate it to the kind of water baptism that is practiced in most of their churches today. They often take it as the means of salvation, or as the outward expression of their conversion, and as the means of admittance into the church. An honest person looking at the text should legitimately question each of these traditional presumptions. First of all, this takes place, probably at a pool of rain water or a spring out in the middle of the desert. So it is highly unlikely that it was being done to gain admittance to some church. There simply was no church out there. His native home was over a thousand miles away. In a similar vein, it would not serve very well as an outward testimony of his conversion because there would be very few to witness it. In addition, the text and context says not a single word about it being done for the remission of his sins. Therefore, let us review this case more carefully.

A popular treatise of recent vintage called “Baptism In The New Testament” (Eerdmans Publishing) was by the notable scholar, Beasley Murray. Because of the circumstances of water baptism as found in the book of Acts, which would normally take it out of the context of our traditional church baptisms, Murray quotes from another highly reputable scholar to supply the real reason for water baptism as found in the early Christian experiences. “In the judgment of Bultmann, the rite at this period must have been similar in import to the baptism of John; it was a bath of purification for the coming reign of God” (page 99). This was simply saying that it was *John’s baptism*, and was for that purpose. Why would certain scholars make this conclusion? Because that is precisely what all the facts point to. What I am sharing with you is not, therefore, some novel theory. This may serve as an emphasis on the need to review the text.

Evangelizing the Ethiopian Eunuch

Philip, who had preached the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ to the Samaritans, was now told to go into the desert and meet a eunuch from Ethiopia. The eunuch was returning from Jerusalem where he had been worshipping. He was now returning back to his native land (Acts 8:26-28). This was also a man of great authority directly under the queen of Ethiopia. The fact that he had been “worshipping” in Jerusalem tells us that he was either a Jew or a proselyte to Judaism. Undoubtedly he had worshiped in the Temple, and was therefore familiar with the Temple *mikvahs* (baptistries), which were for ceremonial purification before entering the Temple services. John 11:55 mentions that all who went up to the Temple services were to “purify themselves.” So baptism was not an unknown subject to this Jewish man. Likewise, the last purification that God ordained for Israel was in anticipation of the kingdom. It was John’s water baptism.

The eunuch was reading from the prophet Isaiah in, what to us is, the 53rd chapter. Philip had the privilege of stepping up into the chariot and explaining to the eunuch *Who* Isaiah was talking about, and I might add, *what* Isaiah was talking about. Here was the

unveiling of the “Suffering Servant” who would bear the sins of the world. And here was the One in whom the eunuch would now place his trust. No doubt, Philip rehearsed the story of John the Baptist pointing to Christ as “The lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world.” Hundreds, if not thousands of people, during the three and one-half year ministry of Christ, placed their faith in Him and were instantly said to be “saved,” “forgiven,” “received mercy,” and “not condemned” (Lk. 7:50; Mk. 2:5; Lk. 19:10; Jn. 8:11; Lk. 18:14, etc., etc.). None of them were ever told to get John’s baptism for spiritual soul salvation. John’s water baptism was for ritual purification in regards to the coming Kingdom of Israel. As long as that Kingdom was anticipated the water purification was applied. Their salvation was always spontaneous and at the feet of Christ, not in some water baptistry.

The same thing is obviously true of this eunuch, who is reported, at least in some Greek texts, to have said, “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God” (v. 37). I John 5:1 says, “Whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ IS BORN OF GOD.” I John 4:15 says, “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God.” Knowing that the eunuch had placed his faith in Christ for spiritual soul salvation, it also follows that this new Jewish convert would submit to John’s water baptism if it was immediately available. The most important fact about this event is what it DOES NOT SAY!—“Here is water!”—but NOT for “salvation or the remission of sins!”

ACTS 9:17,18 & 22:16

“And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, Who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.”

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

In the first passage of Acts 9, Luke records the initial salvation of the apostle Paul who was then called Saul. In the second passage of Acts 22, Paul, himself, is recounting the same event. Contrary to many fundamentalists, Saul was not saved “on the Damascus road” where he was stricken down and used the name of the “Lord.” At that time he was only shocked to realize the One he was persecuting was, in fact, the risen, glorified Jesus of Nazareth. The Lord gave Saul a three day journey for sober reflection on what he had been doing and on the real identity of the One he was actually persecuting. By the time Ananias arrived, it seems that Saul was ready to call upon Christ for salvation and remission of sins. This is precisely what these passages say happened.

In the first passage there were two things that Ananias would be instrumental in doing—first, that Saul “may receive sight,” and second, that Saul may be “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Ananias did the first by the laying on of his hands and Saul “received his sight.” Ananias did the second by ministering to Saul as recounted in Acts 22, and Saul literally, “*rising up* was baptized (and/or filled with the Holy Spirit).”

The preparation that Saul made for his “baptism” and remission of sins was “calling upon the name of the Lord.” Saul “rising up” and “calling on the name of the Lord...was baptized” right on the spot.

Interestingly enough, preachers in the so-called “Church of Christ,” who believe in water baptismal regeneration, also admit that the apostle Paul was Holy Spirit baptized just like the other twelve apostles in Acts chapter two. Now if we compare what is stated in Acts 2 with this passage in Acts 9 we will see a striking similarity.

*“But you shall be **baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days hence...And they were all **filled with the Holy Spirit.**”*
(Acts 1:5 & 2:4)

*“...and be **filled with the Holy Spirit...**and was **baptized.**”*
(Acts 9:17,18)

In both cases the “filling with the Holy Spirit” is descriptive of, and the immediate result of, their being “baptized” by the Holy Spirit. So if Paul was Spirit baptized, and he most certainly was, then this is the passage that tells about it. In addition, if the baptism is descriptive of the actual “washing away of sins,” and it is, then it unquestionably is a spiritual washing. Herein we have both the “Holy Spirit baptism” indicated and the inward “remission of sins” indicated in “One Baptism.” We will see the same thing in the next example—Cornelius and his household.

ACTS 10:44-48; 11:15-17 & 15:7-9

*“While Peter was still speaking these words, the **Holy Spirit fell upon** all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the **gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out** on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.”*

*“And as I began to speak, the **Holy Spirit fell** upon them, as upon us **at the beginning**. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be **baptized with the Holy Spirit.**’ If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?”*

*“And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them **the Holy Spirit**, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, **purifying their hearts by faith**’”*

Most certainly, the salvation of these Gentiles proved to be a crucial turning point in the book of Acts time period. Up until this time the gospel had gone to “no one but the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). We saw a slight variation in this with the gospel being proclaimed to the Samaritans who were considered half-Jews. And as we saw, the Ethiopian eunuch was a Jew or a proselyte. But now the first Gentiles were spoken to by Peter (Acts 15:7). The interesting fact that all must observe is that Peter had to have special revelation before he would even go to a Gentile (Acts 10:1-28).

Why The Special Revelation?

This special revelation that the apostle Peter received consisted of the sheet let down from heaven with all manner of unclean beasts in it, and the voice of God telling Peter to take, kill and eat of them. Such was a shock to Peter’s Jewishness. Therefore as a good Law abiding Jew, he refused. God did this three times to Peter and after each of Peter’s refusals, God would say, “Don’t call common or unclean what God has cleansed.” After the third time this was done, Peter awoke from his trance. He immediately wondered what this meant. (v.17). A strange thing immediately happened wherein some Gentiles stood at the door requesting Peter’s presence in Caesarea to speak to them. That is when the Holy Spirit showed Peter that he should no longer consider the Gentiles “unclean” (Acts 10:28). Now this is brand new revelation for the early Jewish-Christian assemblies. It also meant that Peter would have some careful explanations to make before his Jewish brethren (Acts 11:2 & 3) for his close association with these Gentiles. This is the first indicator to the saints that a change away from the practice of the Law of Moses system was being made.

Some have asked the question, “Why is it that the Jewish apostles needed special revelation to go to the Gentiles, when Christ had already told them that they would be going to all nations?” (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15 & Lk.24:47). To answer this we must understand the context in which the apostles had received these words of Christ. The apostles were still anticipating the Jewish, physical Kingdom of Messiah to be set up. According to those Old Testament prophesies, all the nations would only be blessed after the conversion of Israel. The blessings on restored Israel would in turn flow out to the Gentile nations. All nations would flow into that Kingdom blessing as they accepted Israel’s chosen position and the operation of the Law under the New Covenant program. Thus, the apostles were anticipating, first of all, the conversion of national Israel, and then they would go to the other nations.

Indication of a Change

Israel’s conversion was clearly not happening. There was no repentance on Israel’s part, but primarily opposition. Consequently, they were not ready to evangelize the Gentiles. But now, God was revealing something new. The Gentiles would be accepting the gospel without Israel’s national salvation. And so the apostles were going to move out very cautiously, because this particular revelation also meant that there was a *change being made* in the Law system. At that time it would mean a crack in “the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile” (Eph. 2:14). If the Gentiles were to now be considered as no longer unclean in God’s sight, then “the middle wall” of separation

between Jew and Gentile was actually breaking down. Later, after the salvation of great numbers of Gentiles under the ministry of Paul, they had to have a special conference and additional special revelation (Acts 15) to accommodate the presence of a large number of Gentiles in most assemblies during this period of transition. This meant a large modification of the Mosaic Law system. The Jewish members of the church were still practicing the Law, for they were not told to stop. Whereas, it would be revealed that the Gentiles were totally free from any obligation to practice the Law with its ceremonial system of dietary rules, baptisms and holy days (see Acts 15:24,28; 21:25 & Heb. 9:10). Then at the close of the book of Acts, it would be revealed to the apostle Paul that the whole wall was totally “broken down” (Eph. 2:14,15). Then, even the Jewish brethren would be relieved from the practice of the Mosaic Law (see the whole book of Hebrews, which officially takes the saved Jews out from under the Law system).

Peter’s Message

We are looking back at these events with hindsight, whereas the apostle Peter was walking in new territory, and therefore he was walking very cautiously. It is almost as if Peter was asking the Gentiles to tell him where to begin. Once he arrived at Cornelius’s house, Peter told them that they knew it was “unlawful” for him to even be there (10:28). Therefore, Peter asked them the question “for what reason have you sent for me?” (v. 29). After Cornelius explained his vision, Peter began his message. This was a very brief message, so we will focus at the point where Peter was interrupted.

The very best way to review this event is to go over it very slowly, step by step. I am going to have to do this with emphasis because of the attempts by certain traditions to confuse the issue. Some teachers, who want to get water baptism in before their conversion, will try and reverse the order of the passage and say Luke wasn’t really giving an actual sequence here. They must do this to preserve their false doctrine, because the order in which Luke gives it is positively devastating to their false tradition. However, whenever this event is repeated, it will follow in exactly the very same order.

First of all, we should keep in mind that this was a very unusual audience. It was not merely unusual in the sense that it was the first group of Gentiles listening to a gospel message. It was unusual in that it was a *prepared* audience. These people had been told ahead of time, by an angelic messenger, that Peter would be telling them the way of salvation—“*words whereby you and your house shall be saved*” (Acts 11:14). Therefore, they were gathered together and prepared in heart to hear that message. Consequently, as Peter began his message they were drinking in every single word. They were listening intently, for it meant the remission of their sins and the salvation of their souls.

Obviously, Peter had just begun his message. The text indicates this and Peter, himself, said so—Acts 11:15. He opened by reminding these Gentiles that they had probably already heard some things about Jesus of Nazareth (10:38). He briefly told them of Jesus being rejected and killed by the Jews and of the glorious resurrection of Christ (vs. 39-41). He then told them of Christ instructing them to preach to all the people (v.42). The last words to come out of Peter’s mouth were—“*To Him (Christ) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever **believes in Him** will receive remission of sins*” (v. 43). Peter was only about a minute or two into his message when he was

interrupted. Verse 44 says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word...”

*“And those of the circumcision who believed were **astonished**, as many as came with Peter, because the **gift of the Holy Spirit** had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them **speak with tongues and magnify God**” (Acts 10:45,46).*

So, at this precise point Peter was interrupted by a beautiful phenomenon which was known and understood by the Jewish brethren who came with Peter as the “gift of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues.” They knew this was a special gift that was only given by God to those who exercise true heart faith in Jesus Christ, and have become members in the church, the body of Christ! No doubt they were thinking, “What is the meaning of this?” We can answer this question by several mandatory facts.

No. 1—They had obeyed the gospel!

The apostles themselves had plainly stated that God only gives “the Holy Spirit ...to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32). And plainly, the Gentiles had the Holy Spirit. First of all, therefore, this means they had “obeyed” God. It is interesting to look up the word “*obey*” in the lexicons because most people presume that it means to do something in obedience to God with our flesh. It absolutely does not mean, in and of itself, to do something with our flesh in the physical realm. Such is not at all the case! Strong, Thayer, Vine, etc., all say the same thing, namely, “*Obey*, to listen or hear attentively as a subordinate.” Or, in a short version—“to hear submissively.” Of course, that is exactly what Cornelius and his household were doing as they listened to Peter give the gospel.

That provokes us to ask again the question, “What is the gospel?” And then, “How did they obey it?” If I asked you whether or not you obeyed the signal light at a certain intersection, and precisely how you obeyed it, your answer would depend on what color the signal light was when you arrived at the intersection. If the signal light was *green*, you obeyed it by stepping on the gas and going on through. Whereas, if the signal light was *red*, you obeyed it by stepping on the brakes and coming to a stop. In a similar way, if the gospel amounts to a system of good works, beginning with water baptism, then it is really not “good news,” but a legal system of drudgery. If, on the other hand, the gospel is the “good news” of what Christ, in His death, burial and resurrection, has done for the helpless sinner, and it is offered “*by grace through faith*,” then we can obtain it just like Cornelius and his household—spontaneously, by faith. And this is precisely what Peter gave to these Gentiles that “whoever BELIEVES in Him (Christ) will receive remission of sins.” So, to “obey” or “hear submissively” in this case, meant to “*believe in Him (Christ).*” This is what Cornelius and his household did!

So now we know what the gospel is, and how these Gentiles “obeyed” it. They spontaneously “BELIEVED.” When they did this, it also proves—

No. 2— Their hearts were right before God!

The second fact this proves is that the hearts of these Gentiles were right before God. Peter explained this fact before the whole church council that had gathered in

Jerusalem to fully understand the implications of God's directives toward the Gentiles (Acts 15:7-9). Peter told emphatically that this first group of Gentiles, by his own mouth, had heard "*the gospel and believe(d), so GOD WHO KNOWS THE HEART, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, PURIFYING THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH."*

This makes it unmistakably clear that the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles was the **evidence** that their hearts were right in the sight of God and, therefore, God had "purified (to wash or clean) their hearts" because of their genuine faith and trust in Jesus Christ. This "purification" (or baptism, if you please) was inward and spiritual and gave to the Gentiles the "remission of their sins," exactly as proclaimed by the prophets. This was the inward remission of sins that is common to all ages.

No. 3— They had been Baptized by the Holy Spirit!

In Acts 11:15-17 we have the record of Peter's defense of his actions to his Jewish brethren. Peter had gone into the home of these Gentiles and had eaten with them. This was strictly forbidden by Jewish Law and Peter needed to give an explanation for his actions. Thus Peter rehearsed the whole situation before them. He said, "*And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning (Pentecost, several years before). Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"*

This obviously means that the Gentiles had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit just like the first Jewish community on the Day of Pentecost. It also meant that God had accepted them as joint members of the new Christian community of believers. In fact, that is precisely what the apostle Paul was inspired to write in I Cor. 12:13, "*For by One Spirit have we all been baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles...and have all been made to drink into One Spirit."*

Holy Spirit baptism once again became the all encompassing baptism that would characterize new converts in Christ. The only way Peter could know that they had been saved, and that their hearts had been "purified by faith" was by the observation of the immediate manifestations surrounding the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When the Jews knew the Gentiles had Holy Spirit baptism, they automatically knew the Gentiles had been saved and regenerated by their faith in Christ. This leads to the final question—

What About Their Baptism in Water?

In the immediate context of Peter's message to these Gentiles, he reminded them of John's water baptism (Acts 10:37). In fact, in verses 36 and 37 Peter spoke as if these Gentiles already knew about the preaching concerning Jesus Christ "after the baptism which John preached." So it is understood that they are not unfamiliar with the subject of John's water baptism. Then again, it was also John's water baptism that came to Peter's mind as he remembered the word of the Lord given to them a few days before Pentecost (Acts 1:5 & 11:16). So the water baptism that is plainly suggested twice in the context of the conversion of the first Gentiles is John's water baptism.

Now anyone who has studied John's water baptism knows that John had no reservations about water baptizing Roman soldiers who came to show their favoritism towards adopting the Jewish hope of a coming Messiah and Kingdom. In fact, Luke told us about their questions to John as to the conduct and directives in life—Luke 3:14. Indeed, Cornelius was not the first Roman soldier of rank that had already believed on Christ. As recorded in the Gospel of Luke and Matthew (Matt. 8:5-13 & Luke 7:1-10) one Roman Centurion (who had also built a Synagogue) exemplified faith like no other Jew had ever done, and Christ commended him for it.

In addition, we should remember that certain Jewish water purifications were used regularly on Gentiles who happened to come into the land of Israel. Of course, under Roman military occupation the Romans were not just visitors, so we can be sure the Jews didn't purify them unless they asked for it—Numbers 19:1-22. Note especially verse 10, "strangers." When Romans came to embrace the Savior of the Jews, the water purification was offered to them as well. And so it is with these first Gentiles who were saved under the ministry of Peter who was called "an apostle to the circumcision" (Gal. 2:7-9). Peter makes a rhetorical statement, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" (10:47,48 NASV). And then apparently after their water baptism, Peter remained there a few days.

Some, including myself at one time, thought that probably Peter did not carry through with this water baptism. However there is no solid evidence of this. It is true that later when the Jewish kingdom hope was fading away, and when the apostle Paul gave the distinctive revelations that Gentiles should not have any of the Law imposed upon them (see Acts 15:1-5; Gal. 2:1-9; 4:8-11, 31, etc.), then Gentiles would not be water baptized. This will be emphasized when Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, states that Christ "did not send him to baptize (in water), but to preach the gospel" (I Cor. 1:17).

What did the Water Baptism Really Prove Spiritually?

I will answer that question by stating several things that water baptism obviously DID NOT DO! Cornelius and his household were not water baptized in order to:

- 1.) **Receive the Holy Spirit**—they already had the Spirit—Acts 10:44.
- 2.) **Obey The Gospel**—they already obeyed the gospel—Acts 5:32 & 15:7.
- 3.) **Get Remission of Sins**—they already had remission of sins—Acts 15:7-9.
- 4.) **Get Into Christ**—they already were in Christ—Rom. 8:9; I Jn. 3:24 & 4:13.
- 5.) **Get Into the Kingdom**—they already were in the kingdom—Rom. 14:17.
- 6.) **Get Into the Church**—they already were in the church—Acts 10:46; I Cor. 12:10,28.
- 7.) **Become a Child of God**—they already were children of God—Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:16.
- 8.) **Get Eternal Life**—they already had eternal life—I John 5:11-13.

Actually, when one analyzes what happened to these first Gentile converts, like the apostle Peter did, he will see a remarkable similarity to what happened on the Day of Pentecost when the saints were first baptized by the Holy Spirit. But in addition, there is similarity with the first group that Peter preached to in Acts 2:38. Acts 2:38 and Acts

10:43,44 are basically similar. In both cases the audience “heard” the same gospel. In both cases there were individuals who “repented and/or believed” the gospel message. In both cases there was the inward “baptism and/or purification” of the heart. In addition, in both cases they simultaneously received “the gift of the Holy Spirit and/or the baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

ACTS 15—The Relationship of Gentiles to the Law of Moses

Just before Peter received the revelation to go to these first Gentiles with the gospel message, a new apostle was chosen by the Head of the church—Saul of Tarsus, later called Paul. Though Saul’s conversion took place a good ways away from Jerusalem, near Damascus, yet there is no doubt that the news traveled rapidly back to Jerusalem. Along with that news was the information from Ananias that Saul was a “chosen vessel” to bear Christ’s name “before Gentiles” (Acts 9:15). Indeed, Christ had directly revealed this to Saul, himself (Acts 26:17), at the time of his conversion. In addition, shortly after Peter had spoken to Cornelius and his household, a sizable number of Gentiles were saved in the city of Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). This was nearly four hundred miles north of Jerusalem. Here they are referred to as “Hellenists.” Hellenists were simply Greeks. Earlier in the book of Acts there were “Hellenists” who were Jewish by religion (Acts 6:1; 9:29). In Antioch, however, these Hellenists were Gentiles (Acts 15:23). Barnabas had been sent up to Antioch to strengthen the new converts, and he in turn went to Tarsus to find Saul, and return with him to Antioch (Acts 11:22-26). The saints were first called “Christians” (v. 26) in Antioch. Eventually the Holy Spirit directed Saul (whose popular name became Paul) and Barnabas to make an evangelistic journey into Asia Minor. As a result large groups of Gentiles came to faith in Christ.

Up until this time both the Jewish world and the Roman secular world looked upon these new enthusiastic believers as just a sect of Judaism. This would be partly true right up until the close of the book of Acts. By that time, however, both the secular world and the Jewish world would regard Christianity to be a separate “sister” religion to Judaism with its own distinctive identity.

What would lead to Christianity receiving its own identity was the increasing number of Gentile converts entering the ranks of the many assemblies—even to the extent of many assemblies being almost exclusively composed of Gentiles. In addition, in these assemblies Paul was not encouraging the Gentile members to adopt the Jewish Law customs. He vigorously opposed it (see Galatians). No doubt, this made it a lot more desirable on the part of Gentiles—who had already been attending the synagogues—to turn to Christianity without the necessity of adopting the burdensome Mosaic Law system. Of course, this loss of many potential proselytes to Judaism made the Jewish authorities angry, and as a result they persecuted the apostles very severely.

However, what became a greater problem was certain uninspired teachers who had joined the congregation of Christians in Jerusalem. They would maintain that all these Gentiles needed to be circumcised and adopt the Jewish Law (Acts 15:1 & 5).

When these certain teachers came to Antioch from Judea, they taught that circumcision was a part of the plan of salvation (Acts 15:1). Consequently there was “no small dissension and dispute” with Paul and Barnabas (v. 2). It was determined this

should be settled in Jerusalem. When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem it seemed that the argument was perpetuated by a group of Pharisees who had become believers (v. 5). Of course these Pharisees were only maintaining what the Law itself had demanded, namely, that new converts to Judaism must take upon themselves the Law of Moses. However, these new converts from among the Gentiles were not converts to Judaism, but rather to Jesus Christ. In addition, Christ had given new revelation to Paul that Gentiles were not to take upon themselves the Law of Moses. But now the Jewish leaders in the early church must openly endorse this new revelation. That is precisely what the Holy Spirit was leading them to do (15:28). Furthermore they told the Gentiles that these teachers who had troubled them were not sent from any of the authorities in Jerusalem (v.24). Consequently the burden of the Law observance was not laid upon the Gentile believers (v. 28). The Jewish believers themselves would continue to observe the Law (Acts 21:20), but the Gentiles were “to observe no such thing” (Acts 15:28 & 21:25).

What does this have to do with Water Baptism?

If you keep in mind that John’s water baptism was the last of the Jewish “water purifications” under the Law system (Matt. 3:15) which was imposed upon Israel, it will be obvious that, as far as the Gentiles were concerned, they would no longer need such purifications. They would certainly not need the “*water of purification*” sprinkled upon “*strangers*” (Num. 19:10), nor would they need John’s water “*purification*” (John 3:25). There is every indication in his letters that Paul had NOT been doing it anyway. Under Paul’s ministry the Gentiles were at “liberty” from the Law (Gal. 2:2-4). The writer of the book of Hebrews said that the Mosaic Law system had consisted of “foods and drinks, *variety of baptisms*, and fleshly ordinances imposed *until the time of reformation*” (Heb. 9:10, literal translation). The “*time of reformation*” is the transition period of Acts. These *baptisms* had only “*sanctified to the purification of the flesh*” (Heb. 9:13).

Consequently, when we observe that the Law system was now, officially, not to be imposed upon the new Gentile converts, it means that all water baptisms under that Law system should not be imposed upon the Gentiles as well.

Acts 16:14,15 & 16:30-33

“The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized...”

“And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them that same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized.”

The salvation of Lydia and her household in the city of Thyatira was simply stated. Her heart was opened to the truth of the gospel and she was baptized and her household as well. This is much like Cornelius except there was no water baptism

mentioned, so we will not put any in there. Since Paul was “not sent to water baptize” there is no indication that he did water baptize Gentiles.

The salvation of the Philippian jailor and his household was likewise simple and clear. He asked what he might do to be saved and Paul told him to believe on Christ. No doubt Paul had explained the gospel to him and to all his household. They were likewise said to be “immediately...baptized.” Again, there is no water mentioned, and therefore, no need to put it in there.

Acts 18:8 & I Cor. 1:13-17

*“And **many** of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”*

“Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”

As I have stated earlier in this study, the fact that “many” of the Corinthians were baptized under the ministry of Paul, as recorded in Acts 18:8, indicates to us that this baptism was Holy Spirit baptism which every new convert gets automatically. On the other hand, as seen above in I Corinthians, Paul indicated that he only water baptized a few Corinthians. Paul indicated here that he was talking about John’s water baptism which a man performs. The few that Paul speaks of must have been Jews. We do know this for sure with Crispus, and probably with Stephanas. Crispus was the chief ruler of the synagogue according to Acts 18:8, and Stephanas was one of the “firstfruits of Achaia” according to I Cor.16:15. The first saved in Achaia appeared to be Jews according to Acts 18:4-8.

The fact that Paul “thanked God” that he only water baptized a few tells us that water baptism most certainly was not the plan of salvation. Furthermore, that Paul was “not sent to water baptize” tells us that water baptism is not for the “Gentiles” to whom Paul was “sent.” Eventually, water baptism will be terminated for the Jewish believers as well.

Acts 18:24,25 & 19:1-6

“Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.”

“And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ So they said to him,

‘We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Spirit is (given).’ And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ So they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him Who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.’ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.”

This is the last time in the book of Acts that the subject of baptism is mentioned. In addition, it is the last mention of John’s water baptism as well. A brief review and explanation is in order.

Apollos only knew about the baptism of John (Acts 18:25). Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (18:26). Then Apollos left for the city of Corinth. In the meantime Paul arrived and met some disciples. It is quite possible that these are people Apollos contacted, but we are not told that specifically. There was obviously something missing in the lives of these disciples. Apparently, these disciples showed no inclination toward the miraculous spiritual gifts. So Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed. What is meant by this question is whether they had received the Spirit for the miraculous manifestations. When one believes the gospel of Christ he automatically receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but not necessarily the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. Their answer is revealing to Paul, because it would prove that they were not even saved. The best translation is that they had not known that the Holy Spirit “is” in the sense of being “present” or “had been given” Therefore, they didn’t have the Spirit nor any of the manifestations of the Spirit. Paul sensed that the real problem was that their faith was not actually in Jesus Christ, but only went so far as being centered in John’s baptism.

If their response meant that they did not even know of the existence of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, then they and Paul have real problems on their hands. Obviously this is not what they are saying because Paul does not even try to convince them of the *existence* of the Person of the Holy Spirit. How then should we understand the passage?

“The Holy Spirit is given”

The Person of the Holy Spirit was vital to the ministry of John the Baptist and everyone who followed the ministry of John knew that fact—“For he (John) will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. *He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.* And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” (Luke 1:15,16). In addition, everyone who was a follower of John should have known that a major ingredient of John’s message was the prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit through the Messiah—“He (the Messiah) shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16 & John 1:32, 33). After the day of Pentecost everyone who believed on Jesus Christ automatically received the Holy Spirit Who had been prophesied by John the Baptist.

The fact that Paul does not try to explain the existence of the Holy Spirit to these disciples shows that this is not really the problem. The problem is they do not even know that the Holy Spirit “is,” in the sense of “*has come,*” “*is now present*” or “*is given.*” The answer to that problem is exactly what Paul deals with. Paul used John the Baptist whom they respected. John said, “believe on Him (the Messiah) that would come after him (John), that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4). Paul knew that when they did this they would automatically receive the Holy Spirit—and that is exactly what did happen. “When they heard this (and believed on Christ) they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). Then Paul laid his hands upon them that they might receive the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit (19:6).

Actually Greek scholars have pointed out that there is a similar construction of this verse in Acts 19:2, concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit, with that passage as promised by Jesus Christ in John 7:39—“But this He (Christ) spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him (Christ) would receive; *for the Holy Spirit was not yet,* because Jesus was not yet glorified” (literal translation). Now most all translations supply the word “*given*” after the words “not yet” in order to complete the thought. Jesus was not saying that the Holy Spirit did not yet exist, but rather the Holy Spirit had not yet come! We can understand the very same principle in Acts 19:2. They are not saying they didn’t know of the *existence* of the Holy Spirit but of the *presence* of the Holy Spirit in believers today.

Therefore, since they recognized John as a prophet and had his baptism, Paul gave the truth that John the Baptist gave, namely that people should place their faith in, or believe in, Jesus Christ. When Paul told them this they did exactly as John had said and placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Consequently they were instantly baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. This we would understand as Holy Spirit baptism into Christ and His body, the church.

After this, Paul laid his hands upon them that they might receive the Spirit for the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, thus satisfying Paul’s original question, “Did you receive the Spirit (for these gifts) since you believed?”

Conclusion To This Study

After Acts 15 there is not one single thread of evidence that water baptism served as an initiating rite for new Gentile converts to Christianity, either in any local assembly or in the Christian church universal. As far as we know this only happened under Peter’s ministry to the household of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. On the contrary, Holy Spirit baptism places every member into the church which is Christ’s body (I Cor. 12:13) including Cornelius and his household.

Three factors are important to remember in order to appreciate the termination of the practice of water baptism, both as it had to do with Gentiles, and then as it related to the Jewish members of the church as well.

No. 1—

John’s water baptism was a ritual purification rite in preparation for the prophesied coming kingdom of God over Israel, and in turn over the world (Matt.3:3-6).

The nation of Israel rejected their King and consequently the kingdom was taken from them and postponed (see my study on The Kingdom of God). That kingdom was offered to Israel in two phases. First, under the direct ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ Who was rejected and slain, but also resurrected from the dead. Secondly, it was also offered again on the resurrection side of the cross, and this is important to remember (see parables of Matt. 22:1-7 and Luke 13:6-9). The Jewish brethren were still anticipating that Kingdom, but it was obviously being postponed because the Jewish nation was still rejecting Christ even in light of the abundance of miraculous manifestations. However, as long as there was the possibility of such a Kingdom being established, John's water baptism could still be used.

By Acts chapter 15, the apostles were seeing a new program of an out-calling of Gentiles taking place—Acts 15:14. It seemed to James that “after this” (15:16) program with Gentiles, God would restore His plans for national Israel. However, that program with Gentiles grew larger. Consequently, John's water baptism (which was preparatory for the Kingdom) would be fading away even as those Kingdom hopes were fading away.

No. 2—

John's water baptism was a part of the Mosaic Law system of “meats and drinks, and a variety of *baptisms*, imposed upon Israel until this time of reformation” (Heb. 9:10). When it became increasingly clear that the Law of Moses was being terminated, then this water baptism would disappear also. The revelation that the Law was terminated was only gradually unfolded. At the beginning of the book of Acts, the church was characteristically Jewish and so everyone observed the Law, and with a zeal. By the middle of the book of Acts it was determined that the Gentile converts were not to have the Law system imposed upon them. By the end of the book of Acts, with the writings of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Hebrews, it became abundantly clear that the Law as a system of rule had been “nailed to the cross” and “was now ready to vanish away” in practice—Hebrews 8:13.

No. 3—

The apostle Paul, who was the apostle to the Gentiles, received distinctive revelations about the unique spirituality of the church of Jesus Christ. The many references to the subject of baptism in Paul's letters—with the one exception of his references to, and disparaging remarks concerning water baptism (I Cor. 1:14-17)—were all spiritual in nature, and there is not one drop of water in them—Rom. 6:1-11; I Cor. 6:11; 12:12,13; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:11,12; Eph. 4:1-5; 5:26; Heb. 9:13,14 & Titus 3:5.

The Key to studying Baptism in the book of Acts is basic and simple—

It is the REAL baptism unless it says Water baptism!

— THE END —

APPENDIX

No. 1. Who composed The Church on the Day of Pentecost?

In the book of Acts we read only of the 120 gathered in “one place” when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 2:1,2). After Peter and others preached the gospel to those gathered at the Temple many were converted and the Scriptures say, “those who received his word were baptized; and there were *added* to them that day about three thousand souls” (v. 41). Are the Scriptures saying that the 120 and then the 3000 were the only ones in the Church at this time? No, the Scriptures are not saying this.

Many people were “turned to the Lord” under the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 1:16). Many thousands came to Christ as their Savior and Lord during His earthly ministry. Many of these believers were from the area of the coast land, Galilee, Samaria, Judea and elsewhere and were not in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Certainly most were not immediately in the group of the 120. In addition, we know from many Scriptures that all over this earth there were saved Jews and saved Gentiles who were living up to the light they had. The Gospel was “according to the Scriptures” and that meant the Hebrew Scriptures (I Cor. 15:1-4). What happened to all of these believers on the Day of Pentecost when the baptism of the Holy Spirit first took place? Obviously, they were all baptized by the Holy Spirit as well. We can understand that when the Holy Spirit took up His residence upon the earth, He placed Himself in every believer on the face of the earth no matter where they were located at the time. They all became a part of the “church which is Christ’s body.”

It was only in Jerusalem where the 120 were gathered that the phenomenal signs took place. “The sound as of a rushing mighty wind,” “tongues like as of fire” on the heads of each of the 120 and the gift of “speaking in tongues” were only manifested there at the Temple area. In addition, it was here at the Temple in Jerusalem where the manifest outworking of the Holy Spirit’s directives would begin to take place under the leadership of the apostles. And thus, the fellowship of the church grew from that perspective. This is what is presented to us in history of the book of Acts.

No. 2. Were the believers in Christ gathered for the Feast of Pentecost already “born again” before the Holy Spirit came?

Absolutely! They were already “born of the Spirit” before the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” came on the Day of Pentecost. The “new birth” and the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” are entirely two different things. The new birth is common to all the ages, whereas the baptism of the Holy Spirit is unique to this age. The fact that the Holy Spirit took up residence upon the earth in the lives of believers in a collective manner on the Day of Pentecost does not mean that the Holy Spirit, Who is Divine and omnipresent, did not have access to the lives of repentant souls throughout the ages—He very much did. A repentant believer would always become a “son of God” or a “child of God” by spiritual regeneration. On the Day of Pentecost the 120 did not need to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit—they already were regenerated. They were merely baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. From the Day of Pentecost on, everyone who hears the gospel of Christ and believes is simultaneously “born of the Spirit” and “baptized by the Spirit” into the church which is Christ’s body.

Proof that the new birth is common to all the ages is actually given in the very context where Christ speaks to Nicodemus about his need to be “born again.” First of all, Christ said “unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3). In other passages Christ said that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets would be in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 8:11 & Luke 13:28). That means that all these saints of past ages were “born again.” Then in John 3:8 Christ spoke of those who are born again in the past-perfect tense, “so is everyone *having been* born of the Spirit” (see any interlinier, literal Greek-English translation). In John 1:12 & 13 those who believed in Christ during His earthly ministry are spoken of in the past tense, “who were born...of God.” Again, in John 3:10 where Christ is speaking to Nicodemus, He chides him as a “teacher of Israel, and do not know these things.” Of course, if what Christ is giving is brand new truth, then there was no way possible Nicodemus could have known this truth.

Christ is inferring that this truth is revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures, and so it is. Please note a few of the references from the Hebrew Scriptures. Isa. 1:2, “I (God) have nourished and brought up *children*, and they have rebelled against Me.” Isa. 43:6, “I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’ Bring My *sons* from afar, and My *daughters* from the ends of the earth.” Isa. 63:8, “For He said, ‘surely they are My people, *children* who will not lie.’” And Israel said in response (Isa. 63:16) “Doubtless You are *our Father*...You, O Lord, are *our Father*.” Prov. 3:11,12, “*My son*, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as *a father the son* in whom he delights.” Psalm 82:6, “And all of you are *children of the Most High*.” Psalm 103:13, “As a *father pities his children*, so the Lord pities those who fear Him.” Moses had said of Israel, “Of the Rock Who *begat you*, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God *Who fathered you*. And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them, because of the provocation of *His sons and His daughters*” (Deut. 32:18, 19).

(I am indebted to a brother named Buman Price who first challenged me with this truth that the new birth was common to all the ages.)

No. 3. “Was The Apostle Peter Born Again??”

This is a question that I have invariably asked those who promote the false doctrine of water baptismal regeneration. They teach that the “new birth” Christ said everyone must have in order to get into the Kingdom of God was the “baptism (supposedly in water)” that was first preached by the apostle Peter, in Acts 2:38, on the Day of Pentecost. Of course, in Acts the second chapter, after the Holy Spirit fell on the 120 disciples gathered near the Temple, there is absolutely no record of any of them getting water baptized in order to get into the Kingdom of God. There is only the record of the Holy Spirit coming upon them, the miraculous signs and then Peter preaching to all those who assembled as a result of witnessing the signs, especially that of the miraculous tongues. Of course, those who teach water baptismal regeneration are embarrassed and totally confused as to how to answer this question. I have had some interesting and even humorous responses.

Everybody admits that the apostle Peter and all the other believers gathered there for Pentecost were undoubtedly “born again.” However, how it happened, in light of their perverse teaching about water baptism being the means of regeneration, brings all

kinds of guesses and speculations that always gets them into trouble. The most common speculation is that John's water baptism accomplished it. Of course, if John's water baptism got them "born again" then there was no need for another water baptism. So then they say, "Well, John's baptism only did the physical part and later the Holy Spirit did His part." And then you ask, "how did the Holy Spirit do His part—and when did He do it??" And they usually answer, "the secret things belong to the Lord" (Deut. 29:29).

NO. 4 "The vast majority of Roman Catholics are just baptized Pagans"

Over a billion Roman Catholics, hundreds of millions of Greek Orthodox Catholics, millions of Russian Orthodox Catholics, hundreds of millions of Protestants, and millions of other miscellaneous so-called "Christian" sects perform the water baptism ritual to somehow demonstrate their devotion to God and to get saved, or so they are taught. But what does it all prove??? Absolutely nothing except devotion to a ritual.

A number of years ago (1977-78) Pope Paul the 6th, while entertaining some representatives of the Catholic Charismatic movement, made a public admission that the vast majority of Roman Catholics were just "*baptized pagans*" and did not have "*real conversion.*" Everybody held their breath when he said it and some of the Pope's aides and theologians quickly tried to qualify the Pope's statement. However, they meekly acknowledged "*it was true,*" and "*it's the most startling way to express it,*" and such in Christendom are "*rightly described.*" The Pope, himself, never backed off from the statement. This was reported in the "New Covenant" magazine, which was the official organ of the Catholic Charismatic movement here in the United States. This statement was initially made by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation "On Evangelism In The Modern World." He said, "Today there is a very large number of baptized people who for the most part have not formally renounced their baptism but are entirely indifferent to it and not living in accordance with it." He further said, "The church...is the people of God immersed in the world...(and) has a constant need of being evangelized." In this context the Pope used the expression that the vast majority (were only) "baptized pagans."

A short time later in Vol. 7, No. 7, Jan. 1978 issue of the magazine, the representatives of the National Service Committee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, also issued a statement of their own based on the Pope's terminology. They were concerned about the condition of the Catholic Church in the United States. In "The State of the Catholic Church" and under "Need For Conversion" they said, "49 million Roman Catholics in the United States...(and) millions (are only) 'baptized pagans'" (Page 4 & 10). This Statement was furthermore delivered to all the bishops in the United States.

Such is the testimony from the highest authority in man-made "Christendom" as to the efficacy of the ritual of water baptism! The efficacy of this water baptism is totally sterile as far as producing real Christians. On the other hand, I am a Christian because I have been baptized by a greater baptism than the water ritual. I have been baptized by Christ, Himself, through the agency of the Holy Spirit of God. *This baptism alone is the reality and the substance.* Thankfully God never makes a mistake when He baptizes!