

# PRAY IN THE SPIRIT

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## The Early Record

Walk with me through the early record of the church's fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy: "You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4). Luke mentioned five specific occasions when believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

### 1. Jerusalem

*Acts 2:1* On the day of Pentecost all the believers were meeting together in one place. <sup>2</sup> Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm, and it filled the house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. <sup>4</sup> And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and **began speaking in other languages**, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability.

Jesus baptized these believers in a sovereign manner, without human intervention of any kind. The result was explosive! As a large crowd gathered Peter preached the Gospel to them until they were convicted and begged, "What must we do to be saved?"

*Acts 2:38* Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> **This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentiles—all who have been called by the Lord our God.**"

<sup>41</sup> Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.

It may be intimated from Peter's declaration about God's promise, that the 3,000 converts were also baptized in the Holy Spirit, though we are given no details, other than the general description of their continuing devotion at the end of chapter two.

### 2. Samaria

*Acts 8:14* When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there. <sup>15</sup> As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup> The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit.

<sup>18</sup> When **Simon saw** that the Spirit was given when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power.

While we are given no details of the result of their baptism with the Spirit, it was something demonstrative that Simon saw and that made him want such "power."

### 3. Saul (Paul)

*Acts 9:17* So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup> Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized.

Again, no details were recorded, but we certainly find in Paul's manner of life henceforth a similar devotion and speaking in tongues.

*1 Corinthians 14:18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than any of you.*

#### 4. Gentiles

*Acts 10:44 Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the message.<sup>45</sup> The Jewish believers who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles, too.<sup>46</sup> For **they heard them speaking in tongues** and praising God.*

It was inappropriate for faithful Jews to enter the home of a Gentile, but the Holy Spirit insisted. The Lord was so eager that He did not wait for Peter to finish speaking but poured out the Spirit on those listening. How did the Jewish-Christian entourage know they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit? "They heard them speaking in tongues, just as they had in Acts 2.

*Acts 11:15 "As I began to speak," Peter continued, "the Holy Spirit fell on them, **just as he fell on us at the beginning.**"<sup>16</sup> Then I thought of the Lord's words when he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'*

#### 5. Ephesus

*Acts 19:1 While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the interior regions until he reached Ephesus, on the coast, where he found several believers.<sup>2</sup> "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he asked them.*

*"No," they replied, "we haven't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."*

*<sup>3</sup> "Then what baptism did you experience?" he asked.*

*And they replied, "The baptism of John."*

*<sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John's baptism called for repentance from sin. But John himself told the people to believe in the one who would come later, meaning Jesus."*

*<sup>5</sup> As soon as they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.<sup>6</sup> Then when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and **they spoke in other tongues** and prophesied.*

*<sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.*

Clearly, baptism with water is distinct from baptism with the Spirit. For some, these events seemed to have happened simultaneously, for Cornelius they happened in reverse order, but for most they happened separately. Wherever the immediate results were recorded, the single common expression was speaking in tongues.

### The Proof

By the wisdom of God, based upon the passages we have just read, the founding fathers of the Assemblies of God identified the "initial, physical evidence" of the baptism with the Holy Spirit: speaking in other tongues.

Why is this important? For at least two reasons.

#### 1. Personal assurance.

Many people have wondered, "How will I know if I have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit?" According to these passages, we may be assured that we have received the same experience as the early disciples when we have the same result: speaking in tongues.

## 2. Avoid presumption

Some have protested, "I've been baptized with the Holy Spirit, but I don't speak in tongues." To which I usually respond, "How do you know?"

Simple claims are unsupported. Vague subjective feelings are insufficient evidence. Various gifts of the Spirit are inconsistent indicators. The Jews who accompanied Peter to Cornelius' home were persuaded for *one reason*: "They heard them speak with tongues" just as they themselves had on that Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). It is the same today.

## More Than a Sign

Some have suggested theologically that God has withdrawn speaking in tongues and that any contemporary expression of it is counterfeit. While Paul did write that "tongues will cease" (1 Corinthians 13:8), when they do so, so will prophecy and knowledge. All these will cease when their partial and imperfect expressions are swallowed up in the complete revelation of Christ glorified and His church triumphant. Until then, these expressions of our faith are still necessary for our growth.

The ability to speak in unknown (unlearned) tongues is the first expression resulting from the baptism with the Holy Spirit. But it is so much more than that!

Too many have allowed this gift to lapse into disuse and have lost much as a result. Let's examine what the New Testament teaches about the purposes and effects of speaking in other tongues as the Holy Spirit leads us.

## Speak to God

*1 Corinthians 14:2 For if you have the ability to speak in tongues, you will be talking only to God, since people won't be able to understand you. You will be speaking by the power of the Spirit, but it will all be mysterious.*

This is a language of prayer and worship, for communicating with God directly. Fundamentally, such tongues are not designed for people to understand (except when interpreted by a corresponding gift of the Spirit). Such communication is for God alone, giving voice to the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

*Romans 8:26 And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.*  
*<sup>27</sup> And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.*

Praying in tongues bypasses the logjam of human reason, understanding, and eloquence. Limited vocabulary, uncertain speech, and even a fuzzy brain cannot diminish this line of communication, for it is heart-to-heart, not head-to-head, using words the Holy Spirit gives (and understands). And the result is powerful, because the Spirit directs these prayers according to the will of God. My whims, desires, and fantasies are eliminated from this kind of praying. It is the closest we may come to pure prayer.

## Personal Strength

*1 Corinthians 14:4 A person who speaks in tongues is strengthened personally.*

Many spiritual disciplines are available to improve and develop our spiritual lives, but none is more directly constructive than speaking in tongues. The results are no less mysterious than those of fasting or Bible reading, but much more readily accessible. We may speak in tongues anywhere, anytime.

## **I Will Pray**

*1 Corinthians 14:14 For if I pray in tongues, my spirit is praying, but I don't understand what I am saying.  
15 Well then, what shall I do? I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I understand.*

Once the Holy Spirit has unleashed this gift in your life, you may speak in tongues at will. You do not require a spiritual cascade or emotional exhilaration. You may pray in tongues as easily and freely as you pray in your own mother tongue. You may jump back and forth between tongues (your spirit) and your natural language (your intellect), as you wish. Sometimes, one is more appropriate than the other. At other times, one is more effective than the other.

## **Give Thanks Well**

*1 Corinthians 14:17 You will be giving thanks very well.*

When it comes to giving thanks, you cannot improve on speaking in tongues, combining the best of your thoughts with the fullness of your heart. This is an excellent reason to pray in tongues every day and often. Cultivate the attitude of gratitude.

## **Divine Evidence**

*1 Corinthians 14:22 So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers.*

It was a sign for you the first time you spoke in tongues, trusting the Holy Spirit for moment-to-moment inspiration, and gaining assurance that He was in you and active in you. It may also be a sign for unbelievers, when the words spoken are known to them (though unknown to the speaker), or when accompanied by the gift of interpretation of tongues.

## **Prevent Apostasy**

*Jude 17 But you, my dear friends, must remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ said.  
18 They told you that in the last times there would be scoffers whose purpose in life is to satisfy their ungodly desires. 19 These people are the ones who are creating divisions among you. They follow their natural instincts because they do not have God's Spirit in them.  
20 But you, dear friends, carefully build yourselves up in this most holy faith by praying in the Holy Spirit, staying right at the center of God's love. (The Message)*

Our faith and its practice are strengthened and built up when we pray in the Holy Spirit, for all of the reasons listed above. A regular practice of praying in tongues keeps us "right at the center of God's love," both in receiving and giving it, and steers us away from works of the flesh and ungodly attitudes. What could be more important than that?

Keep the faucet open, keep the flow going, keep the interactive, live connection with God turned on. Pray in the Spirit!

This is a prayer language. This is a devotional language. This is a worship language. This is an intercessory language. This is the language of the Spirit, by which He prays through you, when you choose to cooperate with Him to do so.

It may be the last in the list, but it is not the least of the gifts. It is the very powerful means God has given to build up our personal spiritual lives and connect us closely to His heart. Don't be an observer only; be a participant.

Be continually being filled with the Spirit!