

Born of Water and Spirit

The book of Genesis describes God's creation of the first man as follows:

... then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (2:7)

God first created Adam's body out of *dry* earth as "dust" is essentially dirt *without water*. He then breathed into him the "breath of life," the *neshamah chay* in Hebrew, which means the spirit of the living. Breath and wind are used symbolically throughout the Scriptures to describe the spirit of a man because we cannot see the spirit, only the effects of it, as Jesus referenced:

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

Likewise the Greek word, *pneuma*, translated here in the New Testament as "wind," also means spirit. Finally, man became a "living creature," a *chay nephesh* in Hebrew, or a living soul.

Man is a tripart being—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). Adam became alive—his soul was turned on—when God gave him his spirit. We can see here that it is the spirit, the "core" of our being, that powers our soul, our heart, mind, and emotions, which is ultimately reflected in the visible actions of our body as Jesus declared: "For out of the abundance of the heart [or soul] the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34b). I covered this in great detail in my 3-part Essentials series, *The Architecture of Man*, which is an enhancing complement to this teaching.

In Luke's genealogy of Jesus, Adam is described as, "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). Adam's spiritual father was God. His spirit, the "breath of life," came directly from God (God breathed). Adam was created with a perfect spirit in union with God's Spirit. Prior to the fall, his spirit was uncorrupted. He did not have a sin nature, and thus, his body was uncorrupted. He would have lived forever in that condition. The fall caused a spiritual death in Adam and Eve that all mankind subsequently inherited.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot

enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Water is symbolic here for the spiritual cleansing the Spirit brings to a new believer in Jesus Christ through the word of God. This “born again” experience is a spiritual rebirth where the Holy Spirit cleanses a new believer’s spirit, *regenerating it as He baptizes his spirit into God’s holy nature*. His spirit is inseparably united with God’s Spirit. This is the *reverse* of what happened to the spirits of Adam and Eve at the fall, as Paul described:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:20–22).

A born again believer has his sin nature removed forever. His *spirit* is restored to the status Adam originally possessed. Through this new spiritual union with God he lives “in Christ.” This conversion, even though the believer is born again by the Holy Spirit, *is not being empowered by or filled with the Holy Spirit*. This is the baptism into Jesus Christ which puts the nature of God into the spirit and puts the Spirit into the heart of the believer (the heart fuses the spirit and soul). *It is the righteous internal existence required for a believer from which the Spirit of God can fill his life*. It is like the pilot light for Jesus’ to empower us with the Spirit. Consider what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Paul was saying here that the baptism into the person (“body”) of Jesus Christ prepares a man, or makes him ready, to be filled with (“drink of”) the one Holy Spirit. Notice he wrote, “made to drink.” This baptism prepares the spirit-heart connection of the believer to be an inner battery for the empowerment of the Spirit to fill the soul. There is a twofold work of God for him. First, the Spirit cleanses his spirit, giving him a holy “core,” and enters his heart, then Jesus fills him with the water of His Spirit.

Baptism into Christ Unites Believers

The baptism into Jesus Christ is what unites all true believers. This is how the one, true church exists. This was a common theme of Paul’s letters, for example:

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 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 no male and female, **for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** (Galatians 3:27–28)

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4–6)

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians that there was “one baptism” he was referring to the baptism that unites all believers in Jesus Christ. When a person believes in Jesus the Spirit baptizes him or her into His body. The context of this Scripture was Paul urging the church there to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). He was not referring to *Jesus’* baptism with the Spirit that He originally poured out on Pentecost to empower His disciples *already united in Him*.

It is critical to recognize that there is an *incorrect* view that Jesus’ original baptism on Pentecost was this one baptism and that this was the birth of the church. The rest of this teaching will do irreparable damage to this errant view. It falls apart when one tries to fit all the Biblical pieces together.

The Implementation

John gave us the following account of how Jesus appeared to His disciples (excluding Thomas) after His resurrection:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, **he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (John 20:19–23)

The Greek word *emphysao*, translated here as "breathed," is the same word used in Genesis 2:7 of the Septuagint translation (Greek Old Testament). Consistent Greek translation implies that Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit on His disciples was the same as God breathing the Holy Spirit into Adam. Jesus' action here was emblematic for the *actual* spiritual rebirth that transpired, because each disciple became a *new creation* through it.

An important question arises at this point. Were the disciples baptized into the name of Jesus Christ here? Since Jesus made them a new creation the answer is "yes," because Paul wrote:

Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; (2 Corinthians 5: 17–18)

In other words, if anyone is a new creation, he is in Christ. The fact that the disciples were baptized into the person of Jesus Christ at this point is pivotal to grasp. Because they were not yet empowered with the Holy Spirit, we can clearly see that there is a twofold experience for believers. As we move into the book of Acts, we will see that the apostles and Luke, who wrote Acts, made this distinction. *I suspect that the Lord purposely took this unique action of breathing the Spirit on them for the benefit of their (and our) understanding this twofold process.*

Recall that Jesus had told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them with the Father. Because the disciples were now in Christ, I think Jesus went to the Father soon after His resurrection, and thus, at least once *before* His final ascension recorded in the first chapter of the book of Acts. Consider what Jesus told Mary Magdalene soon after He was resurrected:

“Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘**I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.**’” (John 20:17)

The broader context here details Mary, from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons, crying at the perceived loss of her Lord and then becoming ecstatic as He revealed Himself to her alive again. She was so overjoyed that she seemingly hugged Him and did not want to let go. It seems that Jesus was telling Mary that He had to get going, He had to ascend to the Father and prepare the promised place for His brothers and sisters. This incident happened early on the first day of the week, whereas Jesus appeared to His disciples and breathed the Holy Spirit on them later that day, in the evening.

Concerning Jesus, Paul wrote: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). Notice, that Jesus told Mary, “go to my *brothers*.” After He was resurrected, the Son of Man became the “firstborn among many brothers.” I think Jesus was in a hurry to get to the Father so that He could quickly return and convert each of His brothers into a new creation. I am literally in tears now as this picture has emerged in my mind of my Lord enduring the cross through His great love and then being passionately and unselfishly in a hurry to get to the Father so that His brothers and sisters could finally bear the spiritual image of God.

Lastly here, one needs to also consider that all these related Scriptures are only found in John’s gospel. It would seem that the Holy Spirit used his writing to lay out all these specific points so that we could more deeply understand all that Jesus did for us.

A Fiery Endowment of Power

For forty days after His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and spoke to them about the kingdom of God. He ordered them to stay in Jerusalem and wait to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures record Jesus telling them twice that they would receive *power* once the Holy Spirit came upon them (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Jesus summarized the program for them when He said:

“But **you will receive power** when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

The purpose of the baptism with the Holy Spirit was to empower the church to reveal Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Jesus' reference to the baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:5 is the last time this specific phrase is used in the Bible. There are references to *physical* water baptism after the Holy Spirit was poured out, but the only *spiritual* baptism we read about afterwards is the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. From this point on, the baptism with the Holy Spirit is referred to as receiving the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit falling, the Holy Spirit being poured out, or the Holy Spirit coming upon. This is because, ever since Jesus poured out the promise of the Father on Pentecost, the Spirit has simply overflowed from Him upon new believers as He has continued to build His church. This concept is also reflected by empowered believers laying hands upon new believers to receive this precious gift as it continues to overflow for the witness of Jesus Christ to spread.

Finally, it was time for the disciples to receive this fiery baptism:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:1–12)

This original baptism came with symbolic tongues of fire that divided or dispersed amongst each

disciple and each one subsequently began speaking in tongues. There are several aspects concerning this that need to be clarified.

Speaking in Tongues

First, the word “tongues” here refers to languages. Speaking in tongues means speaking in either a heavenly language or another earthly language. Paul mentioned speaking “in the tongues of men *and* angels” (1 Corinthians 13:1). My experience speaking in tongues aligns with what Paul wrote. I will often speak in what seems to be a heavenly language and other times the Spirit will transition me to speaking in a particular earthly language. Over the years, I have prayed and sang in a multitude of foreign languages. A man from Germany once told me that my praying in tongues was very similar to German. Once when my wife was visiting friends at a Bible college she was praying in tongues with a group of girls and at one point began praying in Russian. There was a foreign student there from Russia who understood everything she was saying.

Second, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit before they spoke in tongues. *A person can be empowered by the Holy Spirit but not speaking in tongues.* Sometimes a believer will be filled but not yet speaking in tongues due to a misunderstanding or wrong teaching about it. I was filled with the Spirit for at least several weeks, or months (I do not recall for sure), before I actually started speaking in tongues.

Third, there is a difference between speaking in tongues and the gift of tongues. When I refer to “speaking in tongues” I am talking about a *personal* prayer language available to every believer who is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The gift of tongues is when the Spirit comes upon a believer and causes him to give a *distinct* utterance in a language that should be interpreted by him or someone else (through the Spirit). The gift of tongues is uniquely given by the Spirit for specific circumstances and not all believers operate in this gift (1 Corinthians 12:30). The gift of tongues was *not* what was going on here at Pentecost. Furthermore, I suspect it took this first batch of disciples a little while to recognize the difference.

Fourth, when a believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit the Spirit enables him to speak in tongues out of his spirit, but he has to initiate it. He has to begin speaking, it does not just happen. The believer

hears the tongue coming from his spirit and uses his mind and mouth to speak it forth as he would with regular speech. The believer can start and stop as he chooses and raise and lower the volume as he chooses, just like he does when he is speaking regularly. Speaking in tongues comes from the believers spirit, as Jesus said, “He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38; KJV).^[1] This heavenly language is constant in the spirit of the believer. He can speak in tongues, at any time, for the rest of his earthly life. In this respect it is like “rivers of living water” because the flow never ends. He can also pray in tongues under his breath without opening his mouth and making a sound, in the same way that a person might regularly think or talk under his breath.

Fifth, Paul wrote to believers to pray in the Spirit with all perseverance and supplication (Ephesians 6:18) and Jude explained that praying in the Spirit builds the believer up in faith or strengthens their conviction in the truth (1:20). What is praying in the Spirit and how does one actually do it? Praying in the Spirit is praying the will of God in Christ. Praying in tongues helps the believer do this. When a believer prays in tongues the Spirit, in union with his spirit, assumes a leadership role. Consider what Jesus said the Spirit would do when He came:

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; there I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:13–15)

Jesus said the Spirit would guide the disciple into all the truth and speak to him the will of God in Christ. Left to himself, it is impossible for a believer to figure out God’s *specific* will for his life. It is impossible for him to pray in accordance with God’s specific will for his life *unless it is revealed to Him*. Praying in tongues is one way that the Spirit guides the believer into the truth. Jesus told us that the Spirit would teach disciples all things (John 14:26; see also 1John 2:27). The Spirit guiding believers to the will of God as they pray in tongues is an aspect of how the Spirit “takes the reins.” Consider what Paul wrote to the Romans:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings [or sighs] too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (8:26–27)

How does the Spirit *practically* intercede for the saints according to the will of God? He does so as they pray in tongues. Interestingly, heavenly tongues are not understood because this intercession is “too deep for [earthly] words.”

Sixth, and last, just because a man receives the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and prays in tongues does not mean he will automatically live empowered by the Spirit for the rest of his life. The empowerment of the Spirit enables him to speak in tongues but this does not spontaneously reveal Jesus Christ in his life. He must continue living by faith and obedience to God. Praying in tongues is most certainly a helpful gift for living empowered by the Spirit, but it is not the equivalent. It is a weapon for the committed disciple. This is why the New Testament does not focus on praying in tongues but on the *weightier* matters of the Christian life—faith, holiness, liberty, love, obedience, perseverance, etc. If a man becomes empowered by the Spirit and prays in tongues he will ultimately just be a useless, “noisy gong or a clanging symbol” (1 Corinthians 13:1) if he does not lay down his life.

To be as clear as I can, a man must be empowered by the Spirit to live a Spirit-filled life. This man can and should pray in tongues because it enables the Spirit to guide him into God’s will in Christ. The Spirit will show the way, but faith and obedience are required to *continue* living a life empowered by the Spirit. ***The Spirit only empowers God’s will, not man’s will.*** A believer can pray in tongues but still be off course and not living a truly Spirit-filled life if he is unwilling or disobedient to his heavenly Father.

An Angelic Connection

With Paul’s reference to speaking in tongues as the language of angels as a starting point on inquiry, it is intriguing to note that this baptism came with a sound like a mighty *wind* and was symbolically portrayed with *fire*. These descriptive attributes may very well be clues to help us more fully

comprehend the power of this baptism and speaking in tongues. Referring to His angels, Psalm 104:4 tells us that God “makes his messengers *winds*, his ministers a flaming *fire*”. John told us that Jesus would baptize repent believers with fire. It seems that through the baptism with the Spirit, Jesus connected His church to God’s heavenly order. I touched on this in my Essentials teaching on [Holy Angels](#) and will repeat it here:

In the present age, Jesus is the Head of the church and His commands are likewise disseminated by angels. John’s vision from the book of Revelation really pulls back the curtain on this truth. Part of John’s description of Jesus included the following:

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. . . . In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.
(Revelation 1:12–13, 16)

Understanding the symbolism of this description goes far into revealing how the true church functions. Jesus, “one like a son of man,” stands in the midst of seven types of churches (“lamp stands”) in seven church ages. He is the Head of the church and He commands it with His word (“sharp two-edged sword”). In His right hand are seven stars which are “the angels of the seven churches” (1:20). This is representative of the fact that these angels are at His disposal to take messages to the churches they are responsible for. In the ensuing chapters, King Jesus dictates His messages to the churches to these angels who are tasked with the delivery of them. The conclusion of each message includes the phrase, “He who has an ear, let him hear **what the Spirit says** to the churches.”

This brings to remembrance what Jesus told His disciples concerning the Spirit:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for **he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak**, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for **he will take what is mine and declare it to you**. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13–15)

Tying this together, we have a picture of a heavenly order where Jesus is dictating messages to angels who are delivering them to the Spirit in the midst of the believers (churches).

In light of what I wrote in the previous section about the leadership of the Holy Spirit in praying the will of God as a believer prays in tongues, it seems that the baptism with the Spirit connected the church to the communication realm of the heavenly order through which Jesus runs His church. This is how the church actually becomes a vessel for the kingdom of heaven to impact the world.

Examples from the Book of Acts

No matter what I write in this teaching there is nothing better for comprehending the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues than the personal experience of it. Likewise, the Spirit primarily used examples of what new believers experienced to instruct the church on how this works. As we move through each of these examples in the book of Acts we will see what we have already learned fall into place in the historical lives of these believers. It is important that *all* the examples in Acts align with the explanations that I have given in this teaching, namely the twofold aspect of the believer being baptized into Christ and then empowered by the Spirit.

After himself being empowered by the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the first gospel message to the crowd. Here we pick up near the end of his preaching and what happened next:

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, **and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.** ... Let all the **house of Israel** therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “**Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.**” ... So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:32–33, 36–39, 41)

Peter, through the Spirit, told the people that if they repented of their sin they would be “baptized ... in the name of Jesus Christ.” This is the first part of God’s twofold work. A repentant believer is baptized into the life of Christ as the Holy Spirit unites with his spirit—regenerating it—and enters his heart. As I explained in *The Architecture of Man*, the heart fuses the spirit and soul so this lays the foundation for the entire nonmaterial being to be empowered. This believer can then be empowered by the Spirit or “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” as Peter stated. To be sure, Peter was indeed referring to the empowerment of the Spirit and not the baptism into Christ when he said, “and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit,” because in his next sentence he referred to this “gift” as the “promise,” which is what Jesus had told him it was (Luke 24:49) and also what he had just called it when he declared that Jesus “having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are *seeing and hearing*.” When the Spirit is poured out upon a believer this can be seen and heard if he then speaks in tongues. When a person repents and the Spirit baptizes him into Christ, there is no associated outward action to be seen and heard. It is simply an act of spiritual regeneration. Peter knew that it was Jesus Who was going to baptize with the Spirit after He received this promise from the Father. The Spirit baptizes believers into the life of Jesus Christ and then Jesus empowers them with the Spirit as the Head and builder of His church.

In this situation, Peter did not lay hands on these new believers to receive the empowerment of the

Spirit. This was most likely due to the fact that he was new to this himself and possibly also because there were thousands of them. We are told “those who received his word were baptized.” This could be a reaffirmation that they were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, however, I think this verse is referring to the fact that they went out and were water baptized somewhere because this is how the disciples would then know that there were about 3,000 of them.

Notably, Peter declared: “For the promise is for you and for your children *and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.*” Despite what some false teachings present, if the Lord has called you to Himself, the promise of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is for you! It is for all believers throughout the *entire* church age.

God’s Design Revealed at the Onset

The fascinating thing is that Jesus never had to tell Peter ahead of time what to do. This is because the design of God for the church is for Jesus to live through us as we are filled with His Spirit. The New Testament is not necessarily a guide to show us how to live, but a framework for God to reveal Himself through Jesus Christ so that we can have life in Him as His Spirit overflows our lives.

It is important to understand that it was God’s plan for Jesus to come to, lead, and fill His church through the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples:

“These things I have spoken to you **while I am still with you**. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, **whom the Father will send in my name**, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:25–26)

and also:

“**I still have many things to say to you**, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you**. All the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:12–15)

What did Jesus mean when He said the Father would send the Holy Spirit *in His name*? “Name” represents the person of Christ so Jesus was saying here that the Father was going to send the Holy Spirit in His person. In other words, Jesus was going to abide in His church through the Holy Spirit. Jesus dialogue with His disciples makes it clear that He was not done being with and teaching them. He was going to come again through the Spirit and then lead, guide, and teach (speak to) His disciples. The baptism in the name of Jesus Christ would put believers in Him and He would empower them with His Spirit so that He could live through them.

Philip Proclaims Christ in Samaria

Next up for examination we have Philip converting Samaritans:

But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, **for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.** Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14–17)

These Samaritans were apparently water baptized by Philip after believing the gospel that he preached to them. They were baptized in the name of Jesus when they believed, but they were not yet empowered by the Holy Spirit at that time. The wording of the Spirit in this passage implies that it was necessary for Peter and John to come and pray for them for this to occur. Why is that?

When Simon (Peter) had the revelation that Jesus was the Son of God, Jesus told him:

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven**, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
(Matthew 16:18–19)

In his teaching series, *The Life of the Messiah from a Jewish Perspective*, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum pointed out that it was Peter who had the role of opening the door to all three people groups—Jews, Samaritans (a mixture of Jews and Gentiles), and Gentiles. Recall also that Jesus told the disciples: “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea [Jews] and Samaria [Samaritans], and to the end of the earth [Gentiles]” (Acts 1:8b). Jesus told Peter, “I will give you the keys of *the kingdom of heaven*,” which further validates my prior assertion that the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is the method by which the kingdom of heaven operates through the church. Peter was given the keys to unleash this heavenly empowerment upon all three people groups.

Technically, the Lord Himself opened the door for the Jews on the day of Pentecost, but Peter’s preaching certainly played an accelerating role in spreading it to the Jewish dispersion gathered in Jerusalem. Philip’s preaching of Christ to the Samaritans did not lead to the empowerment of the Spirit for them because he did not have the key. This seems to be why the apostles sent Peter (and John) there to pray and lay hands on them. Paul was commissioned as an apostle to the gentiles but he did not have the key. As we shall soon see, it would also be Peter who would open the door for the Gentiles when he preached the gospel to Cornelius’ family and friends.

The Conversion of Saul

Next we have the experience of Saul a few days after he was converted on the road to Damascus:

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.” And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ... So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened.” (Acts 9:10–12, 17–19)

An important question arises here. Did Saul have to have hands laid on him to be filled with the Holy

Spirit? We will address this question more conclusively later on, but my answer here is “no”. Ananias laid hands on him so that he would regain his sight, for this is what Jesus told him Saul saw would happen to him in a vision. Note here that Jesus did not necessarily tell Ananias to lay hands on him so that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul was held back by the condition that God had put on him. The removal of this through Ananias’ prayer opened the door for him to then be empowered by the Spirit. *I suspect that Ananias also laid hands on him because this had become a standard church practice by this time.*

Finally, after Paul was empowered with the Holy Spirit, Ananias took him to be water baptized.

Peter Visits the Home of Cornelius

Next we have the account of Peter visiting the home of Cornelius where he preached the gospel to a group of Gentiles gathered there:

So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ... To him [Jesus Christ] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. (Acts 10:34, 43–48)

Before this account, Luke told us the following concerning Cornelius:

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. (Acts 10:1–2)

Being located in Caesarea, Cornelius and his family may have seen and heard Jesus during His earthly ministry or they were probably at least familiar with Him. It could be that Cornelius had heard Jesus speak concerning the kingdom of God and this subsequently led to his devotion. This is all speculation. What we do know is that he was the head of a Gentile family that was already saved by faith in the Old Testament sense. God did not waste much time getting the gospel to them—a classic example of how God faithfully gives more light to those who genuinely seek Him. This Gentile door would be the last of the three that Peter had the key to open.

As soon as Peter declared: “everyone who believes in him [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name,” everyone there became born again. These people were so hungry for the Lord that the Holy Spirit just fell on them. Peter did not say anything about it or lay hands on them. In instantaneous succession, the Spirit baptized them into Christ and then they were filled with the Spirit. Peter and his cohort knew *definitively* that these Gentiles were empowered with the Spirit *because they could see and hear them speaking in tongues*. This is exactly how God designed it to work.

Paul at Ephesus

Our last example from the book of Acts comes from Paul’s trip to Ephesus on his last missionary journey. Here is the account we are given:

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. (Acts 19:1–6)

The paragraph prior to this (Acts 18:24–28) mentions how a Jew named Apollos, “an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures,” had been teaching people about the coming Messiah, but had only experienced the baptism of John (repentance). He was teaching the people about the Messiah from the Old Testament, which John’s baptism inspired him to believe was near at hand, but he apparently was not familiar with Jesus’ ministry, death, resurrection, and the outpouring of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit points out here that, “and it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth,” so that we will understand that these people Paul met at Ephesus had been learning from Apollos. They are described here as “disciples,” but this is simply the English translation of the Greek word, *mathetes*, which means “a learner, pupil, disciple.” They were disciples of Apollos. They were not yet “disciples” of Jesus. *They were not yet born again.*

When Paul met these people he could tell that something was lacking. They were missing something. They were probably talking about the Scriptures, but not about their personal experiences with the Lord Jesus. This is why Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” I suspect that he asked this because they seemed like born again believers who were not yet empowered by the Spirit.

The English Standard Version, which is the primary version that I use on True Vine Life, translates Paul’s question, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit *when* you believed?” It is worth noting that the King James Version translates it: “Have you received the Holy Spirit *since* you believed?” The King James version goes further in illuminating the fact that receiving the empowerment of the Spirit is distinct from the born again experience that occurs when one first believes. Concerning this King James translation, Chuck Smith [explained](#):

Now there are those who object strenuously to that translation, and the Revised Version of the Bible demonstrates their objection. For the Revised Version translates this, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” The question, “Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?” would indicate a separate subsequent work of grace beyond initial saving faith. And because Baptist’s doctrine declares that you receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit upon conversion and deny any further work of grace subsequent to conversion, the question, “Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?” would totally dispute that Baptist position. And so they prefer the translation, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” However, even that presents difficulty to their position, because it would seem to indicate that a person could believe without receiving. Otherwise, why would Paul ask it? The very question itself would indicate that it was possible to be a believer and not have received that fullness of the Spirit.

The key takeaway here is the fact that Paul even asked the question in the first place. *This confirms that it is possible to be a born again believer and not have received the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.*

When these Ephesians heard the name of Jesus (understanding that He was the Messiah) they were instantaneously baptized into the body of Christ. Then, when Paul laid his hands upon them, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began speaking in tongues and operating in the gifts of the Spirit, namely prophesying.

Summary Review of Acts

While going through these examples from the book of Acts, I put together the following spreadsheet summary of these recorded instances:

Biblical Examples of Believers Being Empowered by the Holy Spirit

Verses	Preacher	Receiving Group or Person	Description of Born Again Experience	Description of Empowerment by the Spirit	Hands Laid on by Preacher	Does Bible say Believers Spoke in Tongues?
Acts 2:1-12	N/A	Jewish Disciples of Jesus	N/A	filled with the Holy Spirit	No	Yes
Acts 2:37-39, 41	Peter	Jews	Repentant were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ	the gift of the Holy Spirit	No	No
Acts 8:12, 14-17	Philip	Samaritans	Believers were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus	“he had not yet fallen on any of them” and “they received the Holy Spirit”	Yes	No
Acts 9:9-10, 17-19	Ananias	Saul	Saul was converted on the Damascus road (Ananias called him <i>brother</i>)	filled with the Holy Spirit	Yes	No
Acts 10:34, 43-48	Peter	Gentiles	Cornelius’ family was already saved in the Old Testament sense, but they became born again after hearing the gospel	“the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word” and “the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out”	No	Yes
Acts 19:1-7	Paul	Jews and/ or Gentiles	Having already received the baptism of John, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus after hearing about Him for the first time.	“Did you receive the Holy Spirit ...?” and “the Holy Spirit came on them”	Yes	Yes

Biblical Examples of Believers Empowered by the Holy Spirit

Other than the fact these events clearly validate the twofold work of God, there are three other things we can learn from reviewing this summary.

First, in half of these examples, the Bible does not specify that the newly empowered recipients of the Holy Spirit actually prayed in tongues. This does not mean that they did not, but the fact it is not always mentioned implies that believers can be empowered by the Holy Spirit before they start speaking in tongues.

Second, as previously discussed, Jesus apparently gave Peter the “keys” to the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles so the Bible specifically records him being the first one preaching to or praying for people from these groups to receive the gift of the Spirit.

Third, of the five instances where believers were empowered with the Spirit *after* the first disciples initially received the Spirit on Pentecost, in only three of these did experienced believers actually lay hands on them when they received the Spirit. My conclusion is that laying hands on believers to be

empowered with the Holy Spirit is a symbolic gesture and that it is not actually necessary for a willing believer to be filled. It symbolizes the fact that existing believers in the body of Christ are filled with the Spirit and these sweet waters then overflow or are poured out upon new believers. Finally here, consider what Peter told the circumcision faction in Jerusalem:

“If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17)

What did Peter say is the prerequisite for receiving the empowering gift of the Holy Spirit? Simply believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

My own ministry experiences over the years confirm this. I have seen large groups of people being taught about the empowerment of the Holy Spirit with many or all subsequently becoming filled as they were prayed for as a group and not individually. I always remember a particular time in Nigeria when Michele and I were in a remote village and there were about 30 to 50 kids listening to me teach about this outside their (church) building area. After I prayed for them, there were kids speaking in tongues all over the place. There were kids up in the tree speaking in tongues.

The Old Testament Difference

Believers that were filled with the Spirit before the resurrection of Christ did not speak or pray in tongues and there are recorded examples of all the Spiritual gifts in operation throughout the Old Testament except for two—“various kinds of tongues” and “the interpretation of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:10). Why is this?

Because Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice for sin, believers are now spiritually regenerated (born again) by the Holy Spirit and baptized into His life (name). This began the day He was resurrected. Since believers now have a “clean” spirit united with the Holy Spirit, we can speak in tongues when Jesus empowers us with His Spirit. Paul wrote, “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays ...” (1 Corinthians 14:14a). Not only can New Testament believers now potentially operate in all the Spiritual gifts, as the Spirit dishes them out, but we can now pray in union with the Spirit (in tongues) from within our cleansed spirit. The Spirit uses this prayer life to illuminate our lives in Christ.

If you are fully comprehending this for the first time, then the following Scriptures probably have a lot more meaning to you now:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37–39)

“...whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:14b)

An Explanation from Nature

In the past, when explaining this to people, I have likened the baptism into the name of Jesus Christ as God putting His seed in you and being empowered by the Spirit as Him watering this seed and causing it to grow into the life of Christ within you. I must have been led by the Spirit with this explanation because, while preparing this teaching, I discovered that both Peter and John described the baptism into Christ—the born again experience—as follows:

since **you have been born again**, not of perishable **seed** but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; (1 Peter 1:23)

No one **born of God** makes a practice of sinning, for **God’s seed abides in him**, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9)

I suspect that the parable of the sower (see Matthew 13), which Jesus taught both of them, influenced their thought process here.

We know that Jesus is the Word of God (John 1). When the Spirit baptizes a new believer into the life of Christ, He puts the seed of the Word within him or her. Spirit empowerment causes the seed to grow into the life of Christ within the believer. Tomato seeds grow tomatoes. God’s seed grows the life

of Christ.

Christ is not Divided

The design of God for His church was that the baptism into the life of Jesus Christ and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit would flow together. The whole purpose of the real church is to reveal the life of Jesus Christ so that people may be restored to God and know Him. God's design for His church clearly points to this.

Jesus' own life on earth is our perfect example. He told the Father in prayer:

"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. ... I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:6a, 26)

This is vital to understanding the purpose of the empowerment of the Spirit. It is Christ in us, empowering His church as we abide in Him, so that people may know the love of God and have life in Him. This is where Christianity stops becoming a dry religion.

To conclude, I want to stress that Jesus Christ is alive today in His church. The empowerment of the Holy Spirit is not to be something that one fellowship of believers experiences, but another does not. God's plan was conversion *and* power for all believers. To prepare this Essential teaching I have labored intensively in the word of God. To the best of my knowledge, this teaching connects every New Testament verse related to this topic and explains all of them cohesively. In other words, I have explained the truth on this topic and every related New Testament verse confirms this conclusion. Sincere believers remain divided over this topic because they are not "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). I would encourage you to not be one of them. Christ is not divided. We must be empowered by the Spirit so that *His life* is made known.