

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (I)

By Reinhard Bonnke

In one of my African campaign meetings – in November 2000 – over one million people had a tremendous experience at the same time. They were all baptized in the Holy Spirit.

In Europe, I'm sure 90 per cent of the people have never even heard of such a thing. To them, the Holy Spirit means no more than mathematics to sheep. The things of the Spirit of God belong to a realm that's a million light-years away, metaphorically speaking, from the godless world in which we live today. There's nothing else like it.

That gulf has always been there. People don't know what it's like to meet Jesus Christ until they do. And they don't understand people who have already met him, especially people he has baptized in the Spirit.

The sign of Christ

Now, what was the first thing ever said about Jesus? It was this amazing prophecy: that he would baptize people in the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11, Luke 3:16). John the Baptist was sent by God to announce that Jesus was coming and to tell people how they would be able to identify him. There are religions a-plenty, but Christ stands apart. Before he even began his ministry, people were told that he was to be recognisable as the person who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

We have a right to know who we are dealing with. There are many spirits, many religions and many experiences. What guarantee of authenticity do we have? How can we be sure that we are dealing with the real Christ and not some impostor? The sign of the true Son of God is that he baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Ask Jesus to give you the Spirit and you will not get a scorpion – that is his promise.

Interesting to note is that Jesus didn't baptize in the Spirit while he was here on earth, but only after he had gone back to heaven. **The plan was for us to recognize the signs of his presence after he had gone by his heavenly role, which is to baptize in the Spirit. Baptism in the Spirit wasn't a sign given to the disciples when they were with him. It isn't just something we read about which took place long ago in history. It was – and still is – the sign of his present identity; it has never been changed or withdrawn. It was to characterize Jesus for the whole Christian age.**

What is baptism?

The word "baptism" might seem strange to us today, but in fact, it's quite an ordinary word in Greek, meaning "dipped" or "immersed". It was particularly used to refer to dipping cloth in dye. It's a wonderful image! The cloth was in the dye and the dye in the cloth. As the cloth soaked in the dye, it took on its colour. Baptism therefore has to do with taking on the character of the element into which something is dipped. John the Baptist baptized people in the chilly Jordan River and left them wet and cold. Christ's baptism in the Spirit, meaning we take on the character of the Spirit, is like liquid fire.

The Bible tells us that God's character is that of a consuming fire. Fire in Scripture carries several meanings, not always negative. Luke 3:17-18 (NIV) reads: "*He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.*" Fire means good news, not judgement.

Fire transforms dry bones

In the story of Ezekiel's prophesying to the valley of dry bones, the bones came together and became an army of living men of flesh and blood. God breathed life into those lifeless bones. But there's another way to deal with dry bones – by fire. **Perhaps you have some bone china at home. It's very fine tableware, and rings like a bell when you tap a spoon against it. Bone china begins as tons of old bones, ground to powder. That bone dust is mixed with white clay, which is then moulded, shaped and decorated and passed through a kiln. Out of the fires then comes lovely pure white china to grace our tables.**

There are dry-bone Christians – bone-dry Christians, we would say. **But when these spiritual skeletons, lifeless believers, are baptized in the Holy Spirit and get God's fires in their very bones, they come out as vessels for God to take up in his purposes.** The process leaves its pure, unmistakable and wonderful mark. Just like a potter using his kiln, God uses fire to produce his work. "*We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works*" (Ephesians 2:10). We are his good work, made to produce good works.

Forget about the feelings

The baptism in the Spirit brings permanent power but not a permanent feeling of power. We don't measure power by feelings, or by what we see. **Wires, which are able to carry 110,000 volts, look exactly the same whether they are carrying current or not. Similarly, we cannot judge our own muscular power by feelings, but only by experiment. Strong men don't feel their strength. They can't sit down and enjoy strength at the fireside. However, when asked to lift a heavy weight, they know their strength and just do it.**

The power of God is treasure in "jars of clay" as Paul says (2 Corinthians 4:7). When we sit and rest, or if we are busy in this or that concern, we don't feel full of power. If anything, we feel completely ordinary; we're not aware of his mighty power with us. Nearly all prayers for power are really for a sense of power, to feel the throb or pulsation, but actually that is to miss the point. **Strength is evident when it is used. A man lifts the dumbbells, and his strength shows. Spiritual power is latent strength in our spirit. But when the circumstances call for it to be used, that strength is there. The supply is immediate, matching the need as it arises.**

Some never do anything for God because they don't "feel" that they have the power or strength. They go on praying for power before they take action. Just because they don't feel powerful, they keep on praying for what they probably already have. What a waste of time and effort! If they know God, his power will be there when it's needed. Rich men don't carry millions of dollars around with them. They can draw on their resources whenever they please without having to have their pockets stuffed full of money. We don't need to be trembling under the weight of divine power from breakfast till suppertime. And anyway, it isn't up to us! What we do is because *he* has all the power – not us. That's all that matters.

I've just talked about strong men. Does their strength compel them to work with great energy and gusto? Not at all! They can be strong but lazy. Perhaps they never do anything else with their time than use it to build their muscles. The kind of power some people ask God for is really for something to enthuse and drive them to witness and work, a compelling power, overcoming their lethargy, or overwhelming their fear and reluctance. They want God to give them such a push that they can't help but go out and about and just find themselves witnessing, propelled into service. That's just pie in the sky. It won't happen. God never compels you to serve him in spite of yourself.

This is often the kind of thinking that lies behind prayers for revival: "Revive me, O Lord, put some go into me, capture me and send me." That's a futile prayer. We've many incentives, we can be exhorted and encouraged by all and sundry, but no unseen force will lever us out of our fireside chair into the street. To get up and go is our part of the bargain. God is waiting for us to take that step. He asks, "*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*" (Isaiah 6:8). There's no conscription in the Kingdom of God. **Just one thing is sure: once on our feet, confronting the devil, we can expect the Spirit of God to be with us.**

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (II)

An ongoing flow

The early chapters of the Book of Acts tell us that on the Day of Pentecost the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. The rest of the book shows that they went on being filled, moment-by-moment, without interruption. **Jesus described this filling with the Holy Spirit as a river (see John 7:38).**

Let me use a modern illustration: just think of a car battery. You only need to plug it in to a charger if the car isn't used. If you drive the car, the battery is charged as it goes. The engine needs current to run it but it makes its own current by working. The engine drives the alternator and the alternator feeds current to the engine. If we keep going for God and do what God wants, we are never drained dry.

In California in the winter of 2001 they had an electricity crisis. The big power companies got into financial difficulties. Millions were without electricity. But God's power doesn't fail because of any money problem. Whether we are rich or poor, the promise of God's power is ours. What's more, you can't buy power. Being baptized in the Holy Spirit isn't a sign of how much money we have given to a good cause.

Sometimes power stations are unable to meet demand, but God's power is never in short supply. In fact, with God there's no such thing as a power failure. You can never use up Holy Spirit energies, no matter how much you draw

on them or how hard you work. Scripture says, “*Your strength shall equal your days*” (Deuteronomy 33:25). We need to realise that God doesn’t share out his power according to our merit. He doesn’t gauge power by our worthiness but by the job in hand.

There’s as much power and blessing today as when Paul set out on his missionary itineraries. There’s as much power this week as last week, this year as last or as next; there’s as much power in one place as in another, in one country or one meeting as in another. God’s power is undiminished, unchanging, full voltage, maximum wattage and perfect amperage. God is never half as much with you at one time as at another time, and never twice as much sometimes, either. God has no peak power, because his power is always at its peak. If you have an off day, he doesn’t. If you feel weak, it doesn’t matter. The strength of God has nothing to do with how you feel. And anyway, his strength is made perfect in your weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

When God sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, Moses was worried. “*Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?*” he asked (Exodus 3:11). Well, God wasn’t under any illusions; he knew who Moses was all right. **That wasn’t the point; the deciding factor was who was sending Moses to do the job.** “*I am who I am,*” God said; that was enough (Exodus 3:14). It isn’t who we are that matters, but who he is who equips and sends us.

Spiritual power is renewed, as we need it

Paul prays for the Ephesians that “*the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... his incomparable great power FOR US who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead*” (Ephesians 1:18-20).

The Greek word that Paul uses here to describe the greatness of the available resources is *megethos*. When scientists created the nuclear bomb they wanted a word by which to measure the greatest explosive force known; this was it. The force of that weapon is measured in megatons, one or two megatons of power. But Paul goes one better and talks about “hyper” *megethos* – super greatness. “Mega galactic,” a teenager might say today. That is how we should measure our effectiveness in Christian service, and that is the resource available to every one of God’s servants. Make no mistake about it: it’s a dead-raising, resurrection power.

Some still begin Christian meetings or services by rebuking all the powers of evil in the place. But it isn’t a time when the powers of evil will be especially present – in fact, it is the least likely thing! If people gather together in the name of Jesus, demons definitely don’t! In fact, if they had any sense, they’d keep well away! It seems very odd to me that when we gather in the name of Jesus we so often begin by crediting the devil with joining us. **However, there’s someone who is there every time people gather in Christ’s name – the Holy Spirit. He’s there in full throbbing force. But he isn’t just there when we are in a nice church service; he is never absent.**

When the Spirit of God is there anything can happen, and only dull, phlegmatic hearts can prevent it. Miracles are an ever-present possibility where he is. The Holy Spirit is always in on the act when there’s action for God anywhere. If you don’t work for God, you don’t need power and you won’t get any. But once you are baptized in the Spirit the potency is unstoppable.

The power of God IS God

The power of God is not an impersonal power that can fade away. Holy Spirit power *is* the person of the Holy Spirit and does not evaporate, fade away, or leak. **There’s no such thing as wear and tear over time with God.** If you were filled with the Holy Spirit today, you would still be filled half a century from now, or in a thousand years from now, for a thousand years to God is like one day to us.

Paul could tell the Romans a year or two in advance that he would *come “in the full measure of the blessing of Christ”* and that he would “*impart some spiritual gift*” (benefit) to the church (not to an individual) when he came (Romans 15:29 and 1:11). He knew the abiding and continuous flow of God’s Spirit. The only time Christians need a re-charge is when they have stopped obeying and their contacts with God have become corroded. **They need to clean up their act, and start moving again.**

A friend of mine was cleaning out his garage, and tossed a piece of metal aside into a corner where there was what seemed to be a pile of rubbish. It caused vivid and audible sparking. Investigation revealed an old car battery. The steel bar had shorted across its terminals. The cells still held some charge so he brought it out for possible future use.

For a few folk, that might be a parable – you’ve given up, and think the power has gone. It never goes. Clear the rubbish out of the way, and you will find that God is not so easily switched off.

Not a cold doctrine

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not a cold doctrine. John the Baptist baptized people in the cold waters of River Jordan but Christ was to baptize as in a river of fire. It expressed the difference between cold religious systems and the reality of God who is “*a consuming fire*”. A wood fire burned on the Temple altar, but Christ was to light divine fire on the altar of human hearts.

Jesus certainly fulfilled these expectations. That much, at least, is history. His followers caught a burning faith. “The disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them” (Mark 16:20). They set the dark, cold pagan world aflame. They melted the Iron Empire, conquered the conquerors. Emperors bowed the knee to the One they had crucified as a criminal. Nothing but power from God could effect such marvels. The secret was humble fire-baptized people flaming for God.

That’s how it was. However, down the centuries things seemed to change. **People had fire then, but is it only candles now?** Is that apostolic succession? If we are part of the line, which starts with the apostles, surely there should be something other than long robes, which show the similarity. **We need the true apostolic mantle**, but some fear it as if it were bewitched. How many people think today of Christianity in terms of fire? More people go to church for funerals rather than for life. And some churches are often no more than social clubs or cultural centres with a smattering of religious ceremonial. One church even advertised that it was “the dead centre of the town”!

But one thing I am happy about – *dead and dry things catch fire easily*. That is what I want to see! We should be like braziers set to warm our frozen city streets and bring a glow back into people’s grey lives. Peter said, “*The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off*” (Acts 2:39). We qualify; we are far off.

As I have already said, Jesus did not baptize anyone with fire during his earthly life. He said he would do it after he had gone to God. And he did, beginning on the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. That period “after he had gone to God” is still going on. There’s no change of programme. Jesus is still the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit; he hasn’t retired or changed his role. How could he, when the promise is for people “far off”?

Let me tell you the amazing story of the conquering Christ in early times. As long as the Roman Empire existed, that is where the Gospel was contained, preached to Jews and the Gentiles only around the Mediterranean. Barbarians in the north were not considered possible converts. But somehow the fire began to flicker in the north, and as swiftly as Rome was converted so were the northern tribes, the Germanic peoples, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, Picts and Scots. **They went to plunder Christian lands and were themselves conquered by the faith of their victims.** They in turn then carried the fire far beyond the world known to Rome, to the Orient and “*the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

And what about today? A new chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is being written. Ninety-six years ago, a score of people, black and white, sat facing one another on hard wooden planks and nail kegs in a rundown area of an American city. They had seen what the Word of God promised, that power was available to all in the baptism of the Spirit. It was a tiny spark, but caused a spiritual explosion rippling in wave after wave across nations. Already almost one in every ten people alive has been reached, nearly 600 million in a world of 6 billion. Its thrusts grow more powerful every day. Today Holy Spirit baptism animates tens of millions of new believers in power evangelism. Many of them have never set foot in any historic or main line church, but have just caught the fire from others.

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (III)

The importance of teaching

As the baptism in the Holy Spirit has been taught, it has opened up an important new truth about the Spirit. The Spirit used to be thought of as a general disseminated presence, working gently, unseen and unrealised. In the words of an old hymn, “he comes sweet influence to impart, soft as the breath of evening”. I am sure the Holy Spirit is all

pervading, and does work his purposes out in life even when we are not aware of it. But that is not how Scripture refers to the Spirit. References are normally to his activity. He comes to believers (not the world) and they are very aware of it. The most striking of these manifestations is the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Some have a strange aversion for the supernatural and for speaking in tongues. Why, I do not know. Why should anybody dislike any gift of God that is clearly encouraged in Scripture? I would not refuse any gift from anybody I love. I would not dream of refusing even a daisy plucked from the lawn by one of my grandchildren, my children or my wife. If we love God how can we despise tongues, his special gift?

Some bear down upon this Pentecostal wonder with all the scholarship they can muster. They inoculate themselves with unbelief. They use a serum of theories against current Pentecost for which there is no Bible warrant. They talk about “rightly dividing the Word of God” when in fact they are butchering it. They leave parts of it as dead as mutton and promises buried in the grave of unbelief. They convince themselves and opt out of what the Apostles received. **They include themselves out; I want to be excluded in!** But one thing is beyond all controversy – that **when the Bible talks about a positive empowering act of the Spirit in the lives of believers it is always in terms of physical signs and evidences.** That’s the Bible! Do we want Bible religion or a mild, degouted, brand?

Speaking in tongues

The Baptism in the Spirit with speaking in tongues is the new Reformation. It strengthens all Bible-based evangelical doctrine and gives Christian teaching a new dimension. **Speaking in tongues means that spiritual truths take on a physical character.**

Bible-based faith has always had two sides. From the beginning of time, the Spirit has always operated in the physical sphere as well as the spiritual. The baptism in the Spirit is simply typical of what the Holy Spirit is. I’ll show you that presently. It’s bound to affect body and soul because the Spirit has always related to the physical and material order every bit as much as to the spiritual. Mark 16:20 says “*the Lord confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it*”. One of those signs was speaking in tongues.

Let me show you what I mean – starting with the Old Testament. The prophets of old were not baptized in the Spirit, nor did the Spirit “indwell” them; they were moved when the Spirit came upon them. This was something that marked them as prophets. Miracles also sometimes took place. When these supernatural effects were seen, they were put down to the breath of God. Now, in Hebrew the word for “breath” is the same as the word for “spirit” – *ruwach*. When God touched King Saul everyone could see that that was what had happened to him. They said the breath, or Spirit, of God had come upon him.

The Spirit of the prophets

The baptism in the Spirit endues believers with the Spirit of the prophets. When the prophets experienced God supernaturally they called it the “Spirit of the prophets”. Joel 2:28 promised that that same Spirit of the prophets would be poured out on all flesh, and all kinds of people would prophesy; the Spirit would no longer come upon individuals here and there. Furthermore, the power of the Spirit would not be given for an isolated task but as a permanent gift in Christ to everyone.

That does not mean that everyone baptized in the Spirit of the prophets will perform precisely what Elijah or Isaiah did. 1 Corinthians 12:29 asks appropriately, “*Are all prophets?*” **Nonetheless, the gospel itself has an irreducible prophetic quality. If we take it upon ourselves to share the gospel with others, we need the Spirit of prophecy to convey that message with prophetic authenticity.**

Israel believed that God was always present and always at work behind the scenes. The Psalmists asked God to come out of the hiding places of his power, but they knew he was there. When he went into battle with Israel, he did so by his Spirit. When the wind parted the waters of the Red Sea, it was “*by the blast of his nostrils*” (Exodus 15:8) – in other words, his breath. When prophets prophesied, it was God at work, but God coming as the Spirit of the Lord. Peter used the same terms when he wrote, “*All Scripture is God-breathed*” (2 Tim 3:16).

On the first day of Pentecost “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind filled the whole house where they were sitting ... and tongues of fire came to rest on each of them” (Acts 2:2-3). They all spoke in new tongues, “declaring the wonders of God” (Acts 2:11). Joel’s prophecy was that young and old would prophesy, as Peter

pointed out: *“This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel”* (Acts 2:16). Reading the rest of his speech, it is clear that he equates new tongues with prophecy. Basically, prophecy is utterance under the power of God.

Christ’s experience of the Spirit of God

Christ had a human experience from God to show what the perfect human experience should be. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the Spirit coming upon Christ. The fourth Gospel gives more detail. John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, declared, *“I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him”* (John 1:32). Jesus himself explained, *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news”* (Luke 4:18). Peter, the great apostle, said, *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power”* (Acts 10:38).

Then John the Baptist adds something all-important: *“The one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’”* (John 1:33). **Jesus was the first of multitudes, the first Holy Spirit baptized man on earth. John 3:34 says “God gives the Spirit without limit” and John 1:16 declares “from the fullness of his grace we have all received”. That is the wonderful truth – what he received was for us. He was filled for us so that we, in turn could be filled out of his infinite fullness.**

Jesus identified with us all. He needed to be baptized, he said, because *“it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness”* (Matthew 3:15). Together with John, he established a pattern, which was to be continued down the ages. Everything he ever did was for us. He was born for us, lived for us, was baptized in water for us, baptized in the Spirit for us, ministered, died, rose, ascended to glory for us and is coming back for us. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

He chose the role of man and of all human need: *“He had to be made like his brothers in every way”* (Hebrews 2:17). That is, what he was like is what we should be like. As a human being, he acknowledged his need of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus needed the Holy Spirit, how much more is that true of us? That “righteousness” to which he referred was not only submitting to water baptism, but also to Spirit baptism.

Jesus was the Son of God, but he stood where we all stand as human beings. This meant that the day came when he was anointed with the Spirit. It was not conversion, or new birth. The Son of God never needed that. By his example, he showed that the baptism in the Spirit is not to be confused with regeneration or any other spiritual event. He received a separate and unique experience of the Spirit for his ministry. That is how it should be for us all.

Jesus was not a kind of abnormal or freak man. He was perfect man, in other words the model for us all. He was God incarnate, which we are not, and yet all those who follow him will also know something of God dwelling in them.

A positive experience

The baptism in the Spirit is a positive experience of which we are aware. It is not the same as receiving one of the spiritual gifts, and has precious little to do with having a religious feeling, a dream or a vision. It is certainly not about achieving a new spiritual level and has nothing to do with spiritual progress. **It is a down-to-earth event marked by speaking in tongues. It lights a fire in the soul, brings a new galvanising force and drives us on for God.**

The New Testament tells us about people who were already children of God and familiar with the Spirit of God receiving the Spirit at a particular moment in their lives. One of these was Mary, the mother of Jesus. Around thirty years before she was baptized in the Spirit, the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was highly favoured: *“The Lord is with you. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you”* (Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit overshadowing her made her the mother of Jesus and during her pregnancy she sang in the Spirit the wonderful words we now call the “Magnificat”. Yet, she was one of the one hundred and twenty people who were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the first day of Pentecost, uttering God’s praise in new tongues. Many disciples had healed the sick and cast out demons when Jesus was with them, yet they were also at Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit had to come upon them, too. If they needed it, we need it also.

THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (IV)

The Holy Spirit and his gifts

The Holy Spirit should not be confused with his gifts and works. Speaking in tongues has been likened to the royal ensign raised at the palace to show that the monarch is in residence. The monarch doesn't move in just so the ensign can be raised. Likewise, the Holy Spirit doesn't come just so we can speak with tongues, but when he is there, tongues, like the royal ensign, are in evidence.

A bride doesn't marry the bridegroom for his ring, but for *him*. God's purpose is higher than to leave people marvelling, gaping at his wonders. God isn't a show-off. His purpose is always love; he wants to love us and to enter into a love relationship with. He wants to be with us and us to be with him in dynamic fellowship.

The Holy Spirit is greater than the things he does; his presence in our lives is greater than his gifts. He works on us, through us and with us. He is our strength and the unquenchable fire in our soul. He brings us spiritual gifts, spiritual fruit, unity, applies the blood of Christ to wipe out the stain of our sin, bring us to new birth, and much more. *But ...* quite apart from what he does, the Spirit comes to us as himself, for what he is, our great gift.

It is the desire for God that makes someone a true Pentecostal, not merely signs and wonders. There is more to it than being gifted or "charismatic." We should be "Pentecostalised". Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 about gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit and uses two words, *pneumatikon* and *charismaton*. The *pneumatikon* are spiritual gifts. The *charismaton* are grace gifts. Yet it is the Spirit we stress. The gifts are signs of something greater – they signify that the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within us.

A bridge between heaven and earth

The baptism in the Spirit is our own personal bridge between earth and heaven. Micah 5:7 says the Lord will come down like "*showers on the grass*" – rain on earth from heaven. Perhaps on a stormy day in the countryside you have spotted a rainstorm in the distance. The sky is purple, full of storm clouds. Where it is raining, it looks like a dark wall of rain between the sky and the ground, the cloudy sky and the ground are one, heaven and earth united.

When we are filled with the Spirit, we can correctly talk about "the latter rain". The Holy Spirit has always been the one who brought God's works down to us. He is that link between heaven and earth, bringing heaven down to earth. What we receive when we are baptised in the Spirit is the same reality that we would know in heaven. The Holy One of heaven is the Holy One on earth, God manifested supernaturally, divinely as well as physically.

This brings the gospel home to the "sons of earth", to us human beings. The supernatural Holy Spirit baptism brings spiritual realities to bear upon people who live on the flat dimension of the godless, dead to all spiritual wonders. We get into God's storm clouds of the latter rain, are soaked in the spirit and what we experience is a revelation of things we could never even utter.

Perhaps you have driven your vehicle on a stormy day; others coming towards you on the other side of the road all have their lights on. The cars and trucks are not only wet but also their lights show that they have been where light was needed. You don't need to be a detective to know that five minutes before they had been driving through heavy rain. By the baptism in the Spirit we get into that heavenly rain, the Lord falling as showers on the mown grass. Wherever we go after that we shall carry signs and evidences of it. God will be with us. It will be hard to conceal the signs. Our lights will be shining as we meet all comers on the road. And we shall not be alone, for others coming behind us will carry the same signs of something from heaven. To let your lights shine before men, you need to get into the rain!

A gift, not an achievement

The Baptism in the Spirit is a gift, not an achievement. Nobody is superior to anybody else just because God baptises them with the Spirit. There is no room to talk about two classes of Christians, those who have been baptised

in the Spirit and those who have not. **The gift is for everyone, even if they have not yet collected it.** *“God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). No matter how many sons a rich man has they all sit equally as his sons at the table.*

However, we are exhorted to take advantage of what is available. Jesus said we should ask, seek and knock to obtain the Holy Spirit (Matthew 7:7), while Paul encouraged us to *“be filled with the Spirit”* (Ephesians 5:18). I like what I see in Acts 1: Jesus told *the apostles* (v.2) to *“wait for the gift the Father promised”* (v.4). But by the time we get to 1:15, there are 120 believers who have come together and are filled with the Spirit. They all wanted to get in on the act! **Peter didn't object like Joshua, who objected when some received the Spirit in Moses' camp. Instead, he said, “The promise (that is, the Holy Spirit) is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).**

Elisha

The Old Testament records only one man seeking the Spirit, and that was Elisha. The story of what happened to him is a study in itself. He had no power and worked no miracles. Elijah was the man of God at the time. God had told Elijah to anoint Elisha to take over from him, and Elijah failed to do so. But God had said that Elijah would be taken away. So he asked Elisha what he would like to have before he left him Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit – which doesn't mean twice as much, but simply the normal inheritance of the eldest son. In other words, he wanted to carry on where Elijah left off.

However, Elijah told him it was a hard thing to give Elisha. In fact, that was letting Elisha down lightly for it was impossible for Elijah to give him any power at all. In 1 Kings 19:19 Elijah had already thrown his cloak around him as a sort of commissioning, but it brought no sign of power in Elisha's life.

We have to wait until the second book of Kings before anything of that kind happens. Elijah and Elisha were at Gilgal and Elijah told Elisha, *“Stay here!”* (2 Kings 2:2). But Elisha would not leave Elijah as he moved on to Bethel, then Jericho and finally across the Jordan.

Gilgal was the place the whole Israel people renewed their covenant with God and were circumcised, the place of rededication. We start there. The Holy Spirit is given to us when we are weak but it is not for the casual and indifferent, for the good-time boys, out to taste a new experience. The baptism is wonderful but not for those who only want a wonderful experience. God means serious business with us.

From Gilgal, Elijah and Elisha went on to Bethel. Bethel was where God came to Jacob and began to pull his life together. This had nothing to do with Jacob – who was just intent on getting a good night's sleep at the time – and everything to do with the Lord. Anything admirable about Jacob must be credited to God. Everything was a sign of God's grace. The Holy Spirit is ours on the same terms – that he makes something of us. We cannot use him, but his intention is to use us.

Next on to Jericho – the place of faith's great victory. By now it is clear that the physical progress of Elijah and Elisha across the country was also a kind of spiritual sequence. Leading up to the moment when something special would happen. The Holy Spirit is at work.

Finally, River Jordan. When Israel crossed the Jordan it was decisive for their future. They put their old life behind them to claim a new life in a new land, with no turning back. Jesus took a similar step at Jordan when he was baptised in water and anointed with the Holy Spirit. There's no turning back from the baptism in the Spirit. We can't renounce our experience. We're affected for ever and nothing can change it. There are no temporary baptisms. The Spirit is for life, given for the purpose in serving God for life.

So, what happened to Elijah and Elisha when they reached the Jordan? First, Elijah struck the water with his cloak and the two men crossed to the other bank. Then, Elisha asked to become Elijah's successor. And suddenly Elijah was gone – leaving his cloak lying on the ground! Now Elisha had already had a negative experience with one cloak. As he looked at Elijah's cloak, he could have thought it wasn't worth bothering with. But he picked it up. **All of us need to do something like that – take a step of faith despite our previous experience.** The he did what Elijah did – he struck the waters of the river. And guess what! They did for him what they had done for Elijah – they parted. The God of Elijah became the God of Elisha.

The God of Elijah is your God when you follow right through and pick up the cloak in faith and ask, “Where is the God of Elijah?” (2 Kings 2:14). He is with you! Follow the route taken by Elisha – from dedication at Gilgal to Bethel, where God begins work on you, then on to Jericho where you win your faith battle, and to Jordan where it is now all or nothing forever with God. Then claim your inheritance in Christ!

That’s all! No elaborate effort, no invented conditions, just follow the simple programme, vision, prayer, faith, and dedication. Then when you are filled – *act* filled. Use your cloak of authority!

Scholars are busy scrutinising every word on the baptism in the Spirit, splitting hairs over the way this or that New Testament writer uses them. They are debating what the word “witness” means in Luke and Acts. I just don’t believe that Luke was all that pedantic. The fact is that people who are baptised in the Spirit are “witnesses of these things” (Luke 25:48, Acts 5:32), that is, witnesses of the Resurrection. No, they were not there when he rose, but nor were Peter and the rest. Nonetheless, they were witnesses as they went through life, whatever they did. They showed it in themselves. They were people affected by Resurrection power – the Holy Spirit. That is all God wants, and all we need. It is the ultimate purpose and deepest satisfaction in human life.

Be filled – the rest follows.

<http://www.cfan.org/offices/usa/cfanusa.htm>

From the website of Reinhard Bonnke- the most successful healing evangelist in the world today. He specializes in huge crusades in Africa where up to a million souls are saved and filled with the Spirit. The dead are regularly raised. TP
