

Two Baptisms in the Acts of the Apostles

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There has long been a discussion, in both exegetical and theological circles, about the relationship between water baptism and Spirit baptism. Certainly, there is reference to both baptisms in Luke-Acts (e.g., Luke 3,16; Acts 8,36-38); unfortunately, Luke does not give us enough data about them so that we can understand them in such a way as to answer all questions. On the other hand, it seems that the two baptisms can be distinguished well enough to give us good understanding of the relation between them and the difference that separates them. It is worth perusing Acts to see just what these two baptisms are, and to make sure we do not confuse the one with the other. We begin with the very early statement of Acts, wherein Jesus calls the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit a 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' (Acts 1,5).

All told, there are, in Acts, four moments of baptism in the Holy Spirit: Pentecost (2,4), Samaritans (8,17), Cornelius (10, 44-45), the twelve of Ephesus (19,6). The Samaritan and Ephesus experiences are distinguished from the Pentecost and Cornelius experiences by the laying on of hands as the means by which the Spirit comes; as well, Pentecost knows only prophecy as the gift of the Spirit, whereas the other moments imply or speak directly of other gifts.

Thus, a 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' suggests the Spirit's coming as a person to give a person a gift, the effect of which is public. Each of the four moments mentioned above has its own function in Acts and thus its own particular details and observations from Luke. In the case of Pentecost, the disciples receive the Spirit in order that they might give testimony to gathered Jews concerning 'God's marvelous works' (Acts 2,11). Similar to this Pentecost function is what we find in the Peter-Cornelius episode; here the Spirit gives spiritual gifts to Cornelius in order to convince Peter that Cornelius has the faith to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. In the case of the Samaritans, the gift(s) of the Spirit can be seen in the reaction of Simon who "saw" what the Spirit gave. In the case of the twelve in Ephesus, the gifts presumably are for the benefit of others, since prophecy (speaking on behalf of God), a gift on behalf of others, is mentioned. All told, the four moments (Acts 2, 8, 10, 19) are examples of a baptism in the Holy Spirit which accounts for

gifts of the Spirit. Baptism is a proper term to use here, since the Spirit 'envelops' a person as water might when one is immersed (baptized) in it.

In the sequel to Peter's Pentecost speech we hear Peter encourage people to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2,38). How does baptism in the Holy Spirit relate to baptism in the name of Jesus Christ? Above all, are they two terms for the same experience, or do they refer to two different things? In studying the two 'baptisms', the following points surface.

First, regarding **persons** involved in the baptisms, the two figures, Holy Spirit and (the name of) Jesus Christ, are notably different; all the more so if one tries to imagine them as the substances 'into which the baptized is immersed'. From the four examples of baptism in the Holy Spirit, one understands the giving of the gifts of the Spirit. On the other hand, the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ suggests the externalization-formalization of an interior act of personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, regarding **effects** of baptism in his name, there is no suggestion that those 3000 (Acts 2,41) who responded to Peter's pentecostal preaching exercised any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as in the case of Cornelius and the twelve of Ephesus. It is true that in the story about conversions in Samaria there is no exercise of gifts mentioned, once Peter has laid hands upon the Samaritans and the Spirit comes to them; yet, what Simon saw and longed to reproduce must suppose such an exercise of gifts. Moreover, one cannot rule out, given the subsequent laying on of hands and its results in the Samaritan story (Acts 8,15-17), that the gifts of the Spirit could be received quite some time after baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, even though, as Luke suggests (8,16) that the gifts of the Spirit are a logical sequence to baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

But, to repeat, there is no acknowledgement in the narration of Acts that in Peter's Jerusalem the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit followed upon baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. One cannot rule out the possibility that the Christian community of Jerusalem did enjoy the gifts of the Spirit, but one cannot assume that the gifts of the Spirit is the effect of, or defines 'baptism in the name of Jesus Christ'.

Third, regarding '**temporal distinction**', there is no need that baptism in the Spirit need follow immediately upon baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Cornelius received the gifts of the Spirit *before* baptism in the name of Jesus Christ; the Apostles in Jerusalem received these gifts *neither before nor after* baptism in the

name of Jesus Christ. Samaria received the gifts much later than, and *independently* of baptism in his name; the gifts of the Spirit were *added* to 'baptism in his name' in the case of the twelve in Ephesus. Thus, in the four cases which can fall under the heading of 'baptism in the Holy Spirit', a clear distinction or separation can be made between this baptism and the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ – these examples can only mean that baptism in the Holy Spirit and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ are two separate entities.

Fourth, regarding the **natures** of the baptisms, one can clearly distinguish baptism in the Holy Spirit and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, as suggested earlier. The baptism in the Holy Spirit, described in Luke 3,16; 24,49; Acts 1,5, is not related by speakers (John, Jesus) directly to faith. Faith should be presupposed, as the contexts of these verses suggest, but the baptism in the Spirit is not an intrinsic to faith and its expression in baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. Logical as it is (Acts 8,15) that the baptism in the Spirit follow upon baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, baptism in the Spirit, as Acts presents it, is an entity independent of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

This last point bring us to consider Acts 2,38, with its exhortation to repentance and baptism, and its promise of the Spirit. Like the baptism administered by John, the baptism of Acts 2,38 caps repentance, a repentance which involves a forgiveness and cleansing and a renewed relationship with God; thus, we have here *two* elements: the person's repentance, God's (hoped for) forgiveness. Unlike John's baptism, the baptism of Acts 2,38 also means faith that Jesus is Christ and Lord and dedication to that Jesus Christ. Thus, in the latter baptism, there are *three* elements: the person's repentance, the forgiveness of God, the faith in Jesus and dedication to him. As one is immersed in water, so one is immersed into Jesus Christ (as one can be said to be immersed in the Holy Spirit). Indeed, the thrust of this baptism, as the formulation of 2,38 indicates, is on 'in the name of Jesus Christ'; it represents the apex of personal turning to Jesus and repentance.

What, then, of the phrase (Acts 2,38) "and you will receive the Holy Spirit"? After considering the four differences we noted above between baptism in the Spirit and baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, it seems necessary to conclude that this reception of the Spirit, about which Peter speaks, is a gift of the Spirit different from what is described elsewhere in Acts as the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Particularly, if Peter can assure the 'baptized in the name of Jesus Christ' that they will receive the Holy Spirit, and if these 3000 baptized do not manifest the gifts of

the Spirit, then the reception of the Spirit, referred to in Acts 2,38, must refer to a coming of the Spirit distinct from that associated with baptism in the Holy Spirit. This particular coming of the Spirit is nowhere explained or even expressed in semi-technical language in Acts; we are not given examples of this coming as we are given the four examples of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Clearly this coming of the Spirit follows upon Baptism, as 2,38 shows, but at best it is a part (can we say from Acts, an 'integral part'?) of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ. As separated from baptism in the Holy Spirit, this coming of the Spirit seems better associated closely with baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, as Acts 2,38 suggests.

Having said the above, we can perhaps say a bit more about this 'reception of the Holy Spirit' that we distinguish from baptism in the Holy Spirit. First, the verse 2,38 is not applied only to the one-time preaching of Peter at Pentecost. Verse 2,38, as exegetes read it, is paradigmatic; it is understood to describe the three steps associated with all and every 'baptism in the name of Jesus Christ'. The formality of the statement, and its care in expressing the three steps of repentance, baptism, reception of the Spirit argues this. Thus, any other baptism has associated with it a coming of the Holy Spirit, distinct from any 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' which may be experienced by the believer. Second, though the reception of the Spirit is not defined or explained to the reader, one best explains the vigorous and impressive community of Jewish Christians in 2,42-47 as flowing from the powers of the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to ascribe this marvelous activity to faith alone, and, since there is no evidence here of the gifts of the Spirit, it seems ascribable only to that Spirit which is associated with baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Acts is best understood as conveying that there two distinct comings of the Holy Spirit in the Jesus phenomenon. There is a baptism in the Holy Spirit, which means to bestow on the believer the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is a baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, which means to incorporate the believer into Jesus Christ, with which incorporation the Spirit is given. In discerning these two kinds of reception of the Spirit and in distinguishing the baptism in the Holy Spirit from the baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, there are acknowledged obscurities in the Acts story, lacunae of information we would like to have so that we can be more clear about which Acts teaches.

Part of our problem lies in what might end up being a comfort in this matter.

Theophilus, to whom Luke directs his Gospel and Acts, has already been taught (Luke 1,4) many things; to use the Greek word of 1,4, we can say that Theophilus has already been 'catechized'. It seems most reasonable that Theophilus already knew essential things about the Spirit, about baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, about the gifts of the Spirit. Pauline letters are testimony to what at least Pauline communities knew and believed some twenty years and more before Luke wrote for Theophilus' benefit. For better or worse, many of the blanks in Luke-Acts can be presumed known to Theophilus; that is, Luke builds upon what Theophilus knows and logically can assume basic knowledge on his part. If Luke were starting from the very beginning of catechesis, Acts would necessarily be very much clearer in all its aspects. Given the two choices, 1) that we cannot adequately distinguish the two baptisms Acts mentions and 2) that we can fill in most blanks to come up with a reasonable and coherent understanding of the two baptisms, the second choice seems preferable. Indeed, the first choice leaves one with many more problems, with much more unclarity, than does the second.

The best understanding of Acts, then, leads one to distinguish, on the one hand, baptism in the Holy Spirit from baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, and, on the other, the coming of the Spirit with gifts (e.g., prophecy, speaking in tongues) and the coming of the Spirit consequent upon baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

(A minor consideration. Were the Apostles baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? No matter how one envisions the actual 'baptism-in-his-name' of Acts 2,38 (what actions or words did it involve?), one finds no external deed in the Gospel or in Acts which suggests such a baptism. One can only say that the following of Jesus to the Pentecost, starting with Peter's calling Jesus 'Lord' (Luke 5,8) and his leaving all to follow Jesus (Luke 5,11), suggests that Peter had the dedicatory faith which should lie behind 'baptism in the name of Jesus Christ'. Indeed, on the basis of the already mentioned episodes in Acts 8 (Samaria) and Acts 19 (Ephesus), wherein the baptism in the Spirit followed upon baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, one can argue that there must have been at least the ingredients of baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the Apostles because they enjoyed a baptism in the Holy Spirit.)

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