

IV. The presence of the Spirit in the Old and New Covenants

B. New Covenant

We've been thinking about the role of the Holy Spirit in the old covenant, and now we want to contrast that with the role of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant. This can perhaps be best done by means of a timeline. Let's imagine a timeline on which the left side represents the Old Testament covenant and the right side is the New Testament. The division between these two would come at the cross of Christ. Jesus said at his Last Supper that he was inaugurating a new covenant in his blood. This was the covenant prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah. So the transition between the old and new covenants occurs with the death of Christ. But the effects of that transition are not immediate. There is a transitional period following the cross which is described in the book of Acts in which we have a transition from the old to the new.

The key verse here is Acts 1:8. There Jesus says, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the Earth." Here Jesus describes the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the New Testament church in a progressive series of events beginning first in Jerusalem and Judea, and then Samaria, and then the uttermost parts of the Earth, which would be the Gentile world.

In the book of Acts you see this progression unfolding. For example, in Acts chapter 2 you have the fulfillment of the promise to Jerusalem and to Judea where at Pentecost the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon the disciples. Then in Acts chapter 8 you have the

bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans, who were a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish people, so hybrids in between the Jews and the Gentiles. Then finally in Acts chapter 10 and 11 and 19 you have the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on Gentiles, such as the Roman centurion Cornelius' household, as well as on certain Ephesian disciples of John the Baptist whom Paul encounters in Acts 19.

So in the book of Acts you see this fulfillment of the promise of Acts 1:8 progressively unfolding: first Jerusalem and Judea, then Samaria, and then finally to non-Jewish peoples – to the Gentiles. In the old covenant the locus of the Holy Spirit was in the temple or the tabernacle, specifically in the Holy of Holies (or the most holy place; the inner sanctum of the temple). 2 Chronicles 7:1-3. describes the special presence of God in the Holy of Holies in the temple.

When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And the priests could not enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house. When all the children of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord upon the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the earth on the pavement, and worshiped and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever."

Here at the dedication of Solomon's temple the presence of the Lord comes down in a special manifest way to abide in the temple. Eventually when the nation of Israel was judged by God, before he

brought in the Babylonian armies to conquer and destroy Israel in judgment, his presence withdrew from the temple, leaving them abandoned to their enemies. We read about this in Ezekiel 9:3, “Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house.” There the glory of the Lord which rested on the cherubim inside the Holy of Holies – they were figurines overshadowing the Ark of the Covenant that was in the Holy of Holies containing the Mosaic law – went out from the Holy of Holies to the threshold of the house. God’s presence was leaving Israel. Then in Ezekiel 11:23 we read, “And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.” Here now the glory of God departs from the temple to the Mount of Olives. This is the mountain on the east side of the city. Slowly God’s presence was leaving Israel and abandoning them to the judgment of their enemies, as the Babylonian hordes would come in and destroy Israel.

The presence of God did not simply rest in the tabernacle or in the temple; there were special anointings of the Holy Spirit that would come upon individual people for specific tasks, such as prophecy. For example, look at 1 Peter 1:10-11. Peter says,

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory.

Here Peter says that when these prophets spoke about the coming of the Messiah it was the Spirit of Christ within them that was giving them utterance.

So the Holy Spirit abode in the temple in the Holy of Holies in a special way, but then would also anoint people for special acts such as prophecy.

1. Permanence of presence in believer

In the New Testament, what corresponds to the temple? Since the Jewish temple was destroyed, God does not abide any longer in the temple. Rather, according to the New Testament, the temple of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant is the individual believer. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. And what effects the transition between these two is called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In virtue of being baptized by the Holy Spirit we now become the abiding place of the Holy Spirit, the equivalent, as it were, to the temple in the old covenant. And so we have, for example, statements like 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Paul says, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” There Paul indicates that our bodies are now temples of the Holy Spirit, indwelt by him.

The same thing is taught in the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 3:5-6. Here the author says, “Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful over God’s house as a son. And we are his house if we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope.” Here,

just as Moses was faithful over the house of God in the Old Covenant, Christ is faithful over God's house, and we are his house. We are the house of God now, as he abides in us as his temple.

For the fact that it is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that effects the transition between these two, look at verses such as Luke 3:16. This is the preaching of John the Baptist prior to the advent of Jesus.

John answered them all, "I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

John was carrying out a baptism of water, but he predicted one who was coming after him who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

Turn over to Acts 1:4-5 to see the fulfillment of John the Baptist's prophecy. Now it is Jesus who,

. . . charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Then we have in Pentecost the fulfillment of that in chapter 2 when the Holy Spirit comes and rests upon the disciples and they speak in other languages.

Two more references to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Acts 11:15-16. Here Peter is describing his experience in preaching the Gospel to Cornelius' household,

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, “John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

So Peter thinks of the experience of Cornelius and his household as being the same experience that he and the disciples had at Pentecost. It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” According to this verse, it is by the baptism of the Holy Spirit that we are incorporated into the body of Christ, that we become part of his church, part of his body.

So the baptism of the Holy Spirit is what turns a person into a temple of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit. When you look at the unfolding of the book of Acts you see this happen progressively over time. First Jerusalem and Judea (at Pentecost, the disciples are baptized in the Holy Spirit), then in Acts chapter 8 (Samaritan persons receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit), and then in Acts 10 and 11 you have Gentiles who are baptized in the Holy Spirit and also become part of the body of Christ.

We now want to look at the baptism of the Holy Spirit in more detail, since this is a matter of tremendous confusion in the contemporary church as a result of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. But I think that that will be better reserved for next time. We will take up in more detail the nature of the baptism of the Holy Spirit of which we’ve spoken briefly here.