The Birth of the Church

It is important on God’s side for what he does as described here.  It is important on our side for us to understand what we are a part of in being the church of Jesus Christ.

Let me read the opening three verses.  Acts 2.  “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.  And suddenly, there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.  And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves.  And they rested on each one of them.”

That is the phenomena that God designed to inaugurate the birth of the church.  We are the church.  This is our story.  This is our history.  Now remember, in the first chapter of the Book of Acts, we saw the preparation for the birth of the church.  Now as we come into chapter 2, we will experience through the lens of Holy Scripture the actual beginning of the church.  In chapter 1, the disciples were waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit.  In chapter 2, He arrives.

In chapter 1, the disciples were equipped for their ministry.  In chapter 2, they are empowered for their ministry.  In chapter 1, the believers are held back.  In chapter 2, they are sent out.  Their full resources to declare the gospel message to the ends of the earth are put in place by the arrival of the Holy Spirit, and it is the fulfillment of [Acts 1:8](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Acts%201.8).  “But you shall receive power.  After that, the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the outermost part of the earth.”

This simple explanation in the verses that I read is the inauguration of the next great event of redemptive history.  First, there was the Old Testament, Revelation.  God speaking in many ways and many portions to the fathers by the prophets, establishing truth, true understanding of him and his redemptive purpose in the Old Testament.  Then there was the next great event in redemptive history.  After the completion of the Old Testament, and that was the arrival of God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came and was made flesh and dwelled among us.  And 30 years or so later, the next great event in God’s redemptive purpose, His death, ratifying the new covenant by the sacrifice of Himself.

And a few days later, the next great event, which was the resurrection from the dead by which God affirmed the satisfaction that he had in his own mind over the sacrifice Christ had rendered.  Forty days after that, the next great event.  The next great event was the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ as He went back into heaven to be crowned and seated at the Father’s right hand, having accomplished redemption.

The next great event is this one in chapter 2 of the Book of Acts.  The sending of the Holy Spirit to bring the believers together and establish the church in which He takes up residence.  This had been promised, and we’ll see that promise actually next Sunday, because that promise is stated in [John 7:37](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%207.37).  “On the last day, the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles,” we’ve been talking about on Sunday mornings, “The great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.  He who believes in me as the Scripture said from His innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’  But this he spoke of the spirit whom those who believed in Him were to receive for the spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

By the time you get to Acts 2, Jesus has ascended.  He has been glorified, and now He sends the Holy Spirit.  To borrow an old term that’s not very popular today, this is the inauguration of a new era, a new dispensation, if you will, a whole new age.  A new thing is born that has never been known before.  Something never seen in the Old Testament.  Something promised in the New Testament, and even described in some measure by the Lord Himself who spoke of the church in the 16th chapter of Matthew.  But the church up to this point has been a mystery, something hidden about to be revealed.

And this is the inauguration of the revelation of the church, and what the church is and how the church lives then unfolds through the rest of the writings of the New Testament, even to the consummation of redemption and the place the church will play in final redemption and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ in the Book of Revelation.  So here, we meet the bride of Christ, the church.  Here, we meet the branches connected to Christ who is divine.

Here we meet the flock for whom Jesus is the good shepherd.  Here we meet those who are part of the kingdom of salvation, ruled by the son of God.  The church, it is called a household.  It is called a family of sons by adoption.  It is called a building, an edifice.  It is called a spiritual temple with Jesus and the apostles as the foundation.  It is also called a body, and in fact, it is the body of Christ.  This is the most unique identification of the church in the New Testament.

In fact, in the Old Testament, you can see Israel basically called a vine.  You can see Israel called a kingdom.  You can see Israel identified as a household and a family.  You can see Israel as a building that God is building.  But the unique metaphor for the church found only in the New Testament is that the church is a body.  It is a body of Christ.  It is the union of believers with Christ as the living principal through them all.

“One new man,” Paul says.  Not one nation ethnically, but Jew and gentile all one in Christ.  The wall has come down.  Everyone in the church is in dwelt by the Holy Spirit.  Everyone is placed into the body of Christ by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.  This is what our Lord promised in chapter 1, verse 5.  “For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”  Those are very important words because that is Jesus saying, “This is the baptism with the Holy Spirit.”

When you hear somebody talk about the baptism of the spirit, you want to take them back to [Acts 1:5](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Acts%201.5) and say, “Jesus promised that the baptism with the Holy Spirit would come not many days from now.”  He had to be referring to what happened a few days later on Pentecost.  That is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and I emphasize that because there is so much confusion and misrepresentation of that wondrous work of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.  It is Christ immersing us in the Spirit, in the life of the Spirit, which we share with every other believer and constitute together the body of Christ.

Now as we come to these opening verses, I want to be patient, and I want to be careful, so I’m going to stick pretty close to my notes on this because I want you to understand how significant this event is.  You can’t just run by these verses.  Too much is going on.  Far too much is going on.  Jesus ascended 40 days after His resurrection.  We’re now ten days later when we read verse 1.  When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.  All together in one place.

The believers were together.  That was the pattern from the time of our Lord’s resurrection when He appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and again appeared the same night to them from the period of that first appearing all the way to His ascension.  He met with them, He spent time with them, and even in the ten days intervening, they had been told to go back to Jerusalem and stay together and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, and they did.  They were all together in one place collectively.  We don’t know exactly where the place was.  We see in chapter 1, verse 13, that when they went back to Jerusalem, they went up to the upper room where they were staying, so maybe they just sort of rented out the upper room.

If it was the same upper room where they had had the Passover meal the night that Jesus was betrayed, we don’t know that for certain, but it might have been.  And they must have just sort of decided to stay there since the time was short.  There were 120 of them according to verse 15, so it must have been a fairly roomy place.  Wherever it was, they waited there, and as I told you a week or so ago, it doesn’t say that they prayed for the Holy Spirit to come.

It doesn’t say that they tarried for the Holy Spirit to come.  It doesn’t say that they fulfilled some spiritual requirements.  Doesn’t say that they met the qualifications of Pentecost, or somehow they paid the spiritual price to pull this thing together.  What Luke describes in verse 1 is history, and it is history completely at the discretion of God.  When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place and suddenly there came from heaven.  Mark this down.

The baptism with the Holy Spirit was a sovereign act of God based on God’s timing, not based on anything they did.  Luke points only to the history and only to the timing of God.  When the day of Pentecost had come.  The word Pentecost is a Greek word meaning the 50th part of something or the 50th in sequence or in order.  To the Jews, it was the name of one of their feasts.  It was a feast that took 50 days after Passover.

The Old Testament gave it several names.  In Exodus 23, it’s called *Chag hǎ-qāṣîr*, which is the Feast of Harvest.  Also in Exodus, that’s Exodus 23.  Later on in Exodus 34, it’s called *Chag* *hǎ-Shavuot*, the Feast of Weeks.  And in the Book of Numbers, it’s called the day of first fruits.  So all of those are Old Testament references to this 50 day event.  What is its purpose?

It commemorates the first fruits of the wheat harvest.  Mark that in your mind.  It commemorates, and you might even add, it celebrates the arrival of the first fruits of the wheat harvest.  But it also took on some other characteristics.  After the exile, it became the traditional celebration to remember the giving of the mosaic law.  Now you say, “Why would they connect this with the giving of the Mosaic law?”  The birth day of the Torah.  Because it was about 50 days after the Exodus from Egypt that God gave Moses the law, and so they’ve added another 50 kind of celebration.

So here on this day, this significant event in which they celebrate the harvest, celebrating the first fruits of the harvest to come, the indication the harvest was coming, and celebrate and remember the giving of the Mosaic law.  The Spirit’s timing then on Pentecost is very, very important.  The Spirit comes because God deems that this is the very day the spirit is to come to fulfill pictures from the Old Testament that are very, very important.

And again, I want you to be reminded the spirit’s coming is not in response to them praying.  It’s not in response to them tarrying, whatever that means, or meeting some kind of spiritual condition.  It is God’s sovereign timetable.  We can get a picture of this, and I’m just going to do this in a general sense.  Write down Leviticus 23, and go back on your own when you have time, and go through Leviticus 23 because in Leviticus 23, we learn of the feasts of the Lord given to Israel to celebrate.

And the key feasts really are pictures of the work of Christ.  The first was Passover.  Passover.  That was in the spring on the 14th of Nisan, and Passover was a picture of the death of Christ.  Right?  He was the ultimate Passover lamb, the perfect Passover lamb, the one true sacrifice for sin.  And God bringing the fulfillment of the picture of the Passover had His son die on the Passover.

That is why [1 Corinthians 5:7](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Corinthians%205.7) says, “Christ, our Passover.”  So the first feast of Leviticus 23 was the Passover, which was fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ.  The second feast in Leviticus 23 was the next day after Passover.  The next day.  And it was first fruits.  First fruits.  This was the celebration symbolizing the full harvest to come.  This is a picture of Christ’s resurrection, which came immediately after his death, and [1 Corinthians 15:20](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Corinthians%2015.20) says, “Christ is the first fruits of those who sleep.”

So you have in the first feast, Passover, a picture of the Passover sacrifice of Christ.  In the second one, which is the celebration of first fruits, a picture of Christ who is the first fruits of all who sleep.  Because He lives, we shall live also.  Fifty days later came the third feast.  And it’s discussed in Leviticus 23 around verses 15 and 16.  It’s the Feast of Harvest.  This is Pentecost.

And it celebrates the wheat harvest.  They did it by offering two loaves baked with leaven.  The wheat is baked and offered.  The crop is not yet fully in, but this anticipates a full harvest.  This is why they connected Pentecost with first fruits.  It was a Feast of Harvest, but a Feast of Harvest in the first fruit sense, not because all of the harvest had come in yet, but because the first fruits had arrived, which promised a completion.  What does that have to do with Christ?  It is on the day of Pentecost that the Lord sends the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our future complete inheritance.  The coming of the Holy Spirit is another kind of first fruits.

He comes as the *arrabōn*, the first fruits.  He comes as the engagement ring that word means.  He comes as the down payment of the final complete inheritance.  The earnest of the full harvest that is typified in another feast, the Feast of Trumpets.  Now let me add a note that ties the Feast of Pentecost to the birth of the church as well.  In the first fruits festival the day after Passover, which pictured the resurrection, they brought bread with no leaven.

They brought bread with no leaven.  Why?  What did leaven represent?  Sin.  That celebrated the resurrection of Christ, and so there was no leaven because in Christ, there’s no sin.  He’s the sinless one.  However, when they brought their loaf at Pentecost, it had leaven.  Why?  Because while there’s no sin in Christ, there is sin in the church.  That’s the particularity of these images in Scripture.

And the Pentecost feast, by the way, is not a loosely gathered sheaf offering, but it is a loaf, a real union of particles in a common unit in a common body.  All of that in the Old Testament in Leviticus 23 looks at this significant event.  The Passover looked at Christ’s dead.  The first fruit feast the next day at His resurrection, and then Pentecost 50 days later looked at the promise guarantee given by God in the sending of the Holy Spirit of a full inheritance yet to come in the future.

So in God’s perfect design, since the early ages, the church was designed to be born at Pentecost to fulfill these typical predictions.  The sprit was to come as the first fruit’s guarantee of our full inheritance, and that is exactly what Ephesians 1 says about the coming of the Holy Spirit.  Ephesians 1.  “In Him,” verse 13, “In Him, after you believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise who has given us a pledge of our inheritance.  So I’m all – I’m saying all that to let you know that the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost because of all of this.  This is the divine work of God.”

So when some well-meaning Pentecostal says things like this, here is a quote from one of their journals.  “We believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit according to Acts 2 is given to believers who ask for it,” they are way off.  This is not something you ask for.  This is not something God gives when you apply for it with the right formula.  This is another sovereign act of God at a precise time like all other acts of God, exactly at the moment and in the place and in the way that God deemed it to happen.  The church is born, and the church is a kind of first fruits of the full harvest of all the redeemed.  The Spirit comes as a first fruit guarantee of our future inheritance.”

So they’re all together in one place.  We don’t know exactly where they were, but you look at verse 2, and it mentions the word house.  Whether they were in the upper room of that house or just exactly where, we don’t know, but they were all in one place.  All together, we assume that’s all 120 of them staying together as the Lord told them until the Spirit would come.  And there they were, together, waiting, and on the day of Pentecost, there was, verse 2 says, “Suddenly from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind.  And it filled the whole house where they were sitting.  Suddenly, unexpectedly.  Suddenly, the church is born.  Suddenly, the Holy Spirit arrives.  Instantaneous, unexpected, miraculous, divine, from heaven.”

This is the proper origin.  It takes its source from God.  Let’s look at the phenomena for just a minute.  There came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind.  This is the noise like a wind.  This is not wind.  Wind makes a loud noise.  The wind here, however, is not to indicate actual wind, but to be a metaphor or an analogy to describe the kind of sound they heard.  There’s no wind.  Nothing is blowing around.  There’s no physical wind.  There’s only a sound like a hurricane.  The word translated here, wind, is not the usual one, which is *pneuma*, but it’s one used here, and only one other place in chapter 17, verse 25, and it really means a blast, a blast.

Could as well be an explosion.  It is this mysterious phenomenon.  There’s no motion in the air, and yet the sound was like a hurricane blast from heaven.  It is the very blast of God’s breath.  It reaches the earth all the way from heaven.  This is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that Jesus said would happen in a few days.  The sound was heard all over.  The sound surely gathered the massive crowd that shows up to which Peter preached.

But the presence of the breath of God filled only the house.  The sound from heaven is like a hurricane, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.  They were completely engulfed, completely immersed, completely baptized.  That’s what that word is intended to convey.  You can actually translate it the immersing with the Holy Spirit.  Literally being engulfed with the Holy Spirit.  This is the coming of the breath of God.

The Holy Spirit.  At that moment, they are literally immersed with the Holy Spirit.  Chapter 1 verse 5 is fulfilled, and the church is born.  This is, in a sense, a non-experiential reality, like salvation.  You don’t feel salvation.

There was also visual phenomena in the fire or the tongues that were like fire.  We’ll talk about that in a minute, but this is not an experience.  This is a work of God from heaven that comes down into the souls of believers on this day.

They are literally engulfed and immersed and drown in the presence of the Holy Spirit who then takes up presence and takes up residence in their lives.  First Corinthians 12, 12 and 13, gives us a very important explanation at this point.  For even as the body is one and yet has many members, all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body.  So also is Christ.  How did that happen?  For by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body.  Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we’re all made to drink of one spirit.  Literally we’re saturated with the Spirit, immersed with the Spirit, and we all take in the Holy Spirit.  This is an overwhelming transformation from heaven.  This is a divine miracle, a divine miracle.

As many as were baptized in this way have put on Christ.  That baptism also encompasses our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection as Romans 6 points out.  So on this occasion, for the first time ever in redemptive history, believing group who put their trust in the Savior are immersed in the Holy Spirit, drawn together in one body because they now possess the same spiritual life, the life of God through the Holy Spirit in them.  This becomes the norm for every believer.

[Romans 8:9](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Romans%208.9) says, “Going forward, if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he’s none of his.”  So He takes up residence at the point of salvation in every believer from here on, and we are all baptized into the body of Christ by the same spirit I just read, 1 Corinthians 12.  So this is not an experience you seek.  This is not something you chase.  This is not something you qualify for.  This is essentially a component of salvation.

There is regeneration giving you new life, and then there is this uniting of every believer with all other believers in the body of Christ by sharing the common life of the indwelling Holy Spirit.  Paul says to the Corinthians, “What know you’re not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which you have of God.”  In other words, it comes from God.  The spirit comes from God as a gift from God.  You’re not your own.  You’re bought with a price.  He paid a price.  You belong to Him.  He placed the Spirit in you.

Now I want to say something else about this.  Go back to John 17.  We have to cover all this before we can get into some of the details further down the text.  When Jesus was praying, do you remember this in the 17th chapter to His father?  It was very important to Him to pray for the unity of his own.  So in verse 11, the end of the verse, He’s praying, and He says, “Keep them in your name, the name which you’ve given me that they may be one, even as we are.”  We all know those verses.  He prays for their unity.

Verse 20, “I don’t ask on behalf of these, but for those who believe in me that they may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may be in us so that the world may believe.”  And He says it again in verse 22.  “The glory which you have given me I have given to them that they may be one,” and verse 23.  “I in them and you in me that they may be perfected in unity.”  That’s four times in one prayer Jesus says, “I want them to be one.  I want them to be one.”  You’re probably like me.  You have heard a myriad of sermons through the years from preachers who are saying, “Folks, you know, we really need to help Jesus have his prayer answered because it’s not working out that way.  We need to be united.  We need to love each other.  We need to be one.”

That is not what that is talking about.  The unity that Christ prayed for was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.  The prayer is answered.  We are one.  We might not all act like it, but we are one.  We are one because we have all been immersed in the Holy Spirit and completely endwelled in the Holy Spirit so we share a common life as one body, one living organism with shared life.  All believers baptized into one body constitute the one body of Christ.  We’ve all been made to drink of the same spirit.  We are in union with Him.

If that did not occur on the day of Pentecost, then the prayer of Christ was in vain, unanswered.  I don’t think so.  The baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is the answer to Christ’s prayer.  We’ve all been placed into one body.  That’s why [1 Corinthians 6:17](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20Corinthians%206.17), I go back to that verse a lot.  “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”  If you’re joined to the Lord and I’m joined to the Lord, we’re one with each other.  Right?  We have the same life.  Same life.  That is done by the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The first time it happened, it happened on Pentecost, and then it happened as a matter of course in the salvation of every believer from then on.  So they’re just there.  And then in a moment, suddenly, they hear this hurricane like sound, but there’s no hurricane.  And this breath of God fills the whole house where they’re sitting.  And an audible phenomena, then a visual one.  Verse 3.  “There appeared to them tongues.”  Want you to understand what appeared were little tongues.  Tongues that looked like fire.  It wasn’t real wind, and it wasn’t real fire.

It was the sound of a mushing – a rushing violent wind, and it was the appearance of fire.  Tongues sort of moving like they were flames, distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.  Not physical wind and not physical fire.  This is supernatural.  These little tongues appeared over each one of them, over each one of them to make it clear that with no exception, each had received the Holy Spirit.  Their baptism had occurred.

This is not the baptism of fire of [Matthew 3:11](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matthew%203.11).  The baptism of fire of [Matthew 3:11](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Matthew%203.11) is judgment.  This is the visible manifestation of the descent of the Holy Spirit.  We say, “Well why is it necessary to have a visible demonstration of the Spirit descending and a little tongue over everybody?  It is impossible then for them to know what has happened if there isn’t some means by which they can know that heaven has come down and done this, and the violent rushing wind would say something happened, but the individual tongue over everyone would show that it happened to all of them.”

And by the way, do you remember that when the Holy Spirit came at the baptism of Jesus to empower Jesus for His ministry that the Holy Spirit came down on Him in some form that appeared as if it were what?  A dove.  And rested on Him.  While He was at the Jordan going through His baptism, the Holy Spirit was seen descending as if He were a dove.  Here, the Holy Spirit comes down, and it looks like small tongues, and something like flames resting on the head of the disciples, symbolizing the descent of the Holy Spirit and the baptism that Jesus had promised.

And it is a saturation so that the language of [John 7:37-39](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%207.37-39) is fulfilled that they’re literally engulfed in the Holy Spirit as if he were a river welling up in them and then flowing out of them.  This is not a minimal approach.  You need to know that.  If you’re in the church, this is you.  And again, I say it’s not something you feel.  It’s not something you experience, but it is a reality.  It’s why you love what you love and hate what you hate.  It is why you’re here, why you worship, why you want to obey, why you sing songs, why you give testimony, why you desire to honour God.

Because there’s a power in you controlling you from heaven.  It’s why you love other believers.  It’s why you want to serve them.  It’s why you want to care for them.  You’ve been bought with a price.  You belong to the Lord.  This is what he has given you.  Verse 4 then says, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.”  Again, another way to say essentially the same thing.  Literally inundated with the Holy Spirit.  Immersed with the Holy Spirit, placed in union with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is their life.  Is their life.  Now you’ll never lose the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit himself is the down payment on the future inheritance.  Right?  Ephesians 1.  So he’s God’s engagement ring, God’s guarantee, God’s down payment, God’s first installment, God’s first fruits.  You cannot lose the Holy Spirit.  You cannot be without the Holy Spirit.  That’s permanent.

But the Bible does say this.  The instruction of [Ephesians 5:18](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Ephesians%205.18).  Be being kept filled with the Spirit.  What does that mean?  It simply means let the presence of the Holy Spirit dominate you.  There was that domination at the beginning.  They were completely filled in the Holy Spirit.  They were totally controlled by the Holy Spirit, filled not in the sense that you would fill a glass, static, but filled in the sense that you would fill sails and move something along like in the words of Peter, holy men of God, we’re moved along.

So it’s a feeling that empowers.  I believe that at the point of salvation, every believer is both baptized and filled, and while we will never lose that baptism and we will never forfeit the presence of the Holy Spirit because He Himself is the guarantee of our future inheritance, the challenge for us as believers is to maintain that filling of the Holy Spirit, which is to say to continually yield to the spirit’s power and control so that he moves us.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit, you could say, you don’t experience.  But the filling of the spirit you do.  Because if you’re yielding to the Holy Spirit, then you know you possess joy, gratitude, peace, and all the fruit of the Spirit.  Love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.  When all of those are your attitudes, you know you’re being filled with the Spirit.

The challenge for a Christian is not to redo the baptism.  That’s when the spirit took up residence.  That’s once, and that’s not experiential.  That’s a divine reality like regeneration.  The fruit of it, however, is the work of the Spirit in us to control us for our good and God’s glory, and that’s something that we maintain by the means of grace and by our faithfulness.  There’s never a repeat of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.  But I want you to notice something.

In chapter 4, verse 8, Peter, who obviously was there on the day of Pentecost and was baptized with the Holy Spirit placed into the body, was again filled with the Holy Spirit.  At that point, the Holy Spirit literally took over and controlled him as he spoke.  In chapter 4, verse 31, they prayed.  “The place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”

The filling of the Holy Spirit is the ongoing experience that we want to sustain.  Chapter 6, verse 5.  The statement found approval about finding some men to take care of the duties for the widows so the apostles could give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.  The statement found approval with the whole congregation, and they chose Steven, a man full of faith, full of faith, and the Holy Spirit.  Here was this Spirit filled man, meaning a man who walked in the power of the Spirit, who manifested the fruit of the Spirit.  It shows in verse 8 again that he was full of grace and power.

In the seventh chapter, that wonderful chapter about Steven, when the people heard Steven’s message, it says, verse 54, “They were cut to the quick convicted, began gnashing their teeth at him, but being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven, saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.  In the moment of his suffering, he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he was made ready to face his Lord.”

Chapter 9.  The conversion of Paul.  “Ananias departed, entered the house.  After laying his hands on Paul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”  This concept of being filled with the Holy Spirit simply means that the Holy Spirit who is in full residence in the life of a believer is taking over complete control.  That’s the idea.

And that’s why Ephesians 5 says, “Be being kept filled with the spirit.  Apply the means of grace to stay in the will of the Holy Spirit.”  In chapter 11, for example, news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem.  They sent Barnabas off to Antioch, and when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord.  Now this is Barnabas.  He was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit.  Everybody is baptized with the Holy Spirit at conversion, but we’re not always full of the Holy Spirit.  That is completely under His control.  Completely under His control.

Chapter 13.  Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixes his gaze on Elymas, the magician, sorcerer.  End of chapter 13, verse 52, the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.  So that’s the pursuit of your life.  Not the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but to be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.  That’s what we’re after.  That is experiential.  Baptism is positional.  Filling is practical.

Baptism grants the Holy Spirit.  Filling yields to Him.  Nowhere in the New Testament is anybody ever told to seek to be baptized.  But we are told to be being kept filled.  The best way to understand that is to compare Galatians 3 with Ephesians 5.  In Ephesians 5, be being kept filled with the Spirit, and the results are all laid out in Ephesians 5, “Speak to yourself in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, sing and make melody, your heart with the Lord, being submissive husbands, wives, parents, children, slaves, masters, all the relationships.  If you’re filled with the Holy Spirit, all those relationships fall in line to the honour of God.”

In Galatians 3, you have all exactly the same relationships, exactly the same instruction, only instead of saying be filled with the spirit as in 5:18 of Ephesians, in [Galatians 3:16](http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Galatians%203.16), it says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”  What does it mean to be filled with the spirit?  It is to be dominated by the Word which dwells in you richly.  This isn’t mystical.  You’re not chasing some kind of esoteric experience with the Holy Spirit.

To be filled with the spirit is to be under his total control, and that means to be obedient to his will as revealed in his Word.  So the church is born on the day of Pentecost.  And what signifies its birth is the arrival of the Holy Spirit.  You say, “Wait a minute.  Hasn’t the Holy Spirit been around before?”  Of course, but Jesus said there’s a distinction.  He told the disciples, “He has been with you.  He will be in you.”

It’s not a question of whether he’s there or not.  It’s a question of degree.  This is a new dimension, and the with you and in you distinguishes the body concept, which isn’t in the Old Testament in which we’re united in some way uniquely in a common shared life.  That’s just one feeble way to explain this amazing moment in God’s economy when a new era was born.  And you’re a part of it because at your salvation, you were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and He lives in you.  Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And you must be continually being kept filled with the Holy Spirit by allowing Him to control your life, move you along in obedience and accord to divine truth.  Why is it important to study the Bible?  Because how do you know the will of the Holy Spirit if you don’t know the revelation of the Holy Spirit’s will in Scripture?

Well, that’s what happened in the opening three and a half verses.  The rest we’ll leave for next time, and maybe the time after that.