

3 Transitional Baptisms: Peter's Keys: How Believers Qualified to be Baptized by the Holy Spirit: (1) Water Baptism for Jews in Acts 2:38

VI. The Three Transitional Baptisms:

A. The Jews (Acts 2):

1. Following the Lord's baptism, which announced his public ministry, the next three years saw many Jews come to recognize Him as Messiah.
2. At Pentecost there were others who were witnesses to the public ministry of Jesus but who had become accessories before the fact in his crucifixion. An "accessory before the fact" is defined by *Black's Law Dictionary* (rev, 4th ed., p. 29) as "one who, being absent at the time a crime is committed, yet assists, procures, counsels, incites, induces, encourages, or commands another to commit it."
3. This is the evil generation to which Peter refers in Acts 2:40 and to whom he preaches during the first part of the chapter.
4. They were not baptized by John. Until Peter's sermon they did not believe that Jesus was the Christ. In fact, they were in agreement with their religious leaders that the Lord was a blasphemer Who should be executed according to Jewish law. However, they sloughed off the dirty work upon the Romans who obliged them in order to keep things quiet in Jerusalem:

John 19:6 - When therefore the chief priests and officers saw Jesus, they cried out, saying, "Crucify, crucify [imperative mood of σταυρώ, *stauroō*]!" Pilate said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him."

v. 7 - The Jews answered him, "We have a law [**Leviticus 24:17** which establishes blasphemy as a capital crime], and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God."

v. 14b - And Pilate said to the Jews, "Behold, your King!"

v. 15 - They therefore cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him, Crucify Him [imperative mood]!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

5. This is the same group of Jews which now has responded to Peter's message in Acts 2 and inquires as to what each of them must do in light of their collective crime.
6. Peter instructs them to repent: all are to confess their involvement in the execution of their Messiah and Savior.
7. In order to make a full break with the religious, political, and cultural Zeitgeist of which they were a part their fellowship with God was contingent upon a public demonstration that would renounce their involvement in the crucifixion and confirm their new affiliation with those who proclaim that Jesus is the Christ.
8. How would these things be accomplished? By repentance and baptism by immersion in water. This public performance of the latter would accomplish three things:
 1. It would illustrate that they understood the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit,
 2. it would result in establishing fellowship with God through the forgiveness of their sins, and
 3. it would also result in the baptism of the Holy Spirit which would move them into the spiritual life of the Church Age.

9. Forgiveness became a reality when they repented of their “crime” and then participated in a public ritual that demonstrated their change of allegiance from Judaism over to Christianity while illustrating the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
10. This was an answer to our Lord’s intercessory prayer for His executioners spoken from the cross:

Luke 23:34 - “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

11. Following Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 there was a large group of Jews who suddenly came to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. They each responded in the manner prescribed by Peter: they repented, they observed the ritual of water baptism, and as a result were forgiven and then baptized by the Holy Spirit.
12. Dr. Zane C. Hodges has written a paper on this passage and refers to it as “transitional.” The Jews who *initially* believed in Christ following Pentecost had to be inaugurated into the universal church and this verse prescribes how this was accomplished:

Tanton, Lanny Thomas. “The Gospel and Water Baptism: A Study of Acts 2:38,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 3:1 (Spring 1990): 49-50:

In Acts 2:38, forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit are *both* viewed as benefits to be bestowed subsequent to the realization that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (2:37). That realization in itself would be regenerating—but baptism must precede the other two experiences. Forgiveness would restore harmonious relations between the baptized person and God and would put him in a category where God could bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit upon him. The sequence of events is clearly transitional in God’s dealings and is not normative today. It is directly related to the special guilt of Peter’s audience. (p. 49)

Forgiveness removes the barrier of sin, its estrangement and distance, between man and God. It enables fellowship and communion. Since it is a personal thing, **God determines in every age and circumstance what the conditions of forgiveness, the conditions of fellowship, are to be.** Under the law a sacrifice might be a means of forgiveness. On the day of *Pentecost* for the Jewish crowd to whom Peter spoke, it was baptism. (p. 50) [Zane C. Hodges, “Acts” (unpublished class notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall, 1984), 16, 14.]

13. The “transitional” concept lines up with the principle that the pre-canon period of the Church Age is a transitional period from the dispensation of Israel over to the Church Age.
14. During this transitional period a certain number of things were of a temporary nature. For example, the apostles were of permanent rank but of a limited number. Once the last apostle died there were no more and communication of doctrine was transferred exclusively to pastor-teachers.
15. The temporary spiritual gifts were phased out including prophecy, healing, miracles, languages, and the interpretation of languages.
16. These gifts were dramatic and spectacular and served as credentials to validate the identity of the apostles. The gift of languages was unique in that it functioned as a warning to the Jews of their impending removal from history as a nation which occurred in A.D. 70.
17. In addition we see within this transition period the phasing in of believers who were initial converts to Christianity.
18. This transition was away from the spiritual life of Israel, which was a ritual plan, over to the spiritual life of the Church Age which is a power plan administered by the indwelling and filling ministries of the Holy Spirit.

19. We discover that Peter possessed three keys that were designed to introduce three distinct groups of people into the body of Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
20. Peter is invested with these keys and commissioned to open the door of the universal church with them:

Matthew 16:19 - “I [Jesus] will give you [Peter] the keys to the kingdom of heaven [Peter is vested with authority to open the doors of the kingdom to certain groups of people]; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven [those who reject the Gospel will be bound by Peter, i.e., forbidden entry into the kingdom having already been bound by the eternal decree that salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone], and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven [those who believe the Gospel will be loosed by Peter, i.e., allowed entry into the kingdom having already been loosed by the eternal decree that salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone].”

21. Peter is to use the power of the keys to make a transition away from the spiritual life of the dispensation of Israel over to the spiritual life of the Church Age.
22. Peter has the keys by which he has the authority to allow or forbid *initial* entry into the spiritual life of the Church Age, but all twelve apostles have the power to bind from or loose into the kingdom thereafter:

Matthew 18:18 - “Truly I say to you [plural of *σὺ*, *su*: the twelve disciples referenced in verse 1], whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

23. Entry into the spiritual kingdom of the Church occurs at the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a mystery doctrine of the Church Age, which was prophesied on several occasions in the Gospels and Acts.
24. A few principles regarding the baptism of the Holy Spirit are important to review here:
 1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs when the omnipotence of the Spirit enters the believer into union with Christ placing him into the body of Christ.
 2. Being placed into union with Christ results in positional sanctification, an eternal relationship with God, eternal security in this relationship, and the possession of Top Circle assets.
 3. This ministry of the Holy Spirit is unique to the Church Age believer.
 4. These relationships invest believers as royal priests, making a specialized priesthood such as the Levites obsolete.
 5. Consequently, the individual priesthood of each Church Age believer nullifies all specialized priesthoods that have developed since Pentecost.
 6. The Lord prophesied the baptism of the Holy Spirit on at least three occasions, John 7:37-39, John 14:19-20, and:

Acts 1:5 - “John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

7. These prophecies were fulfilled in three stages beginning ten days after the ascension on the feast of Pentecost.
25. There are three groups of people involved in this transitional process in which water baptism is an integral part. Initial converts in the first two categories will not be baptized by the Holy Spirit without Peter unlocking the door.

26. Peter is the doorkeeper. He has the keys. He is authorized to loose those who have responded to the Gospel into the spiritual life of the Church by means of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

27. These three groups are summarized by Dr. Hodges in his paper on the book of Acts:

Tanton. "The Gospel and Water Baptism," 50-51:

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit did not become the immediate possession of every believer. Baptism had to precede the giving of the Spirit. (p. 50)

In Samaria, Samaritans receive the promised Spirit through the laying on of the Apostles' hands, that the Jewish-Samaritan schism might be prevented from injuring the unity of the Church.

In the house of Cornelius the Spirit is received upon the exercise of faith and before baptism. No pure Gentile, according to Scripture, has ever been required to receive baptism before receiving the Spirit.

From Romans 8:9 it may be inferred that the transitional requirement of baptism had vanished and the Apostle equates possession of the Spirit with the mere fact of being a Christian. [Hodges, "Acts," 15.]

Therefore, in regard to the gift of the Holy Spirit three observations follow: (1) although the Old Testament saint was regenerated, he did not permanently possess the Spirit.

John 7:37 - And on the last day, the great day of the feast [of Tabernacles], Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me,

v. 38 - and let the one who believes in Me drink. Just as the Scripture says, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

John 7:39 - 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.

(2) the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which is a sign that one has entered the Church Age, was given to the Jews in Acts 2 upon their baptism; and (3) as one goes through the Book of Acts it becomes apparent that regeneration, forgiveness, and the reception of the Holy Spirit occur, normatively, at the moment of faith. (p. 51)

28. In Acts 2 the key to entering into the body of Christ is repentance and baptism after which the door is opened for the Jews and stays open for them from that point forward.

29. The two other groups who needed Peter's keys in order to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit were the Samaritans and the Gentiles.