

Joel Remarkable Prophecy of the Outpouring of the Spirit #10 What is the gift of the Holy Spirit in Ac. 2:38?

Intro: In this extensive sermon series I've tried to show the meaning of the NT texts dealing with the outpouring and reception of the Holy Spirit. One of the interpretive challenges of our study of the Holy Spirit is the meaning of Ac. 2:38 which has served as the central passage for the idea that there were two receptions of the Spirit in the NT era: 1) a non-miraculous one that occurs at baptism; 2) a second miraculous one that occurs after baptism (in the form of spiritual gifts).

I have suggested to you that Ac. 2:38 is likely referring to spiritual gifts and offered several reasons for that in my last lesson.

There are however a few objections that I think deserve some attention before bringing the series to a close.

“The gift of the Spirit” is not the same things as “gifts of the Spirit”.

At first this argument sounds reasonable. It might be argued that if Peter had meant that those who obey the gospel were to receive a spiritual gift he would have said, “you shall receive a gift or gifts of the Spirit”.

However note that the only other occurrence of the expression “gift of the Holy Spirit” in the NT refers to the reception of spiritual gifts.

And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also. (Acts 10:45)

“If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:17)

Note also that this reception of the Spirit is equated with what Jews had been receiving prior to this moment after believing.

“Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” (Acts 10:47)

In the context, the “we” is Peter and the six Jewish brethren who came with Him to Cornelius’ household (i.e. Jews).

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning. “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

“If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (Acts 11:15-17)

Contextually Peter is addressing not only the apostles but a larger company of Jewish brethren who were contending that Peter was wrong in going among the Gentiles and eating with them (See Ac. 11:1). And Peter affirms that the Holy Spirit was given to “us” (believing Jews).

“The gift of the Holy Spirit” is promised to all who are baptized for all time.

One of the things that has made brethren through the years develop the dual concept of Holy Spirit reception is the seeming statement that “the gift of the Holy Spirit” was for all who obey the gospel for all time. Thus, it is argued that this has to be something other than spiritual gifts.

I believe there is a reasonable response to this objection.

Ac. 2:39 may appear to say that “the gift of the Holy Spirit” was for all believers for all time. However in an earlier lesson we pointed out several parallel statements between Peter’s words and the prophecy of Joel. Thus, Ac. 2:39 is not a promise of spiritual gifts forever, but is contextually limited to the fulfillment of God’s plan as spoken through Joel. Remember we showed that the outpouring of the Spirit would be coordinate with “signs and wonders” before the great and notable day of the Lord. Thus, “as many as the Lord calls” does not mean all believers for all time, but the believing remnant who lived “before the day of the Lord”.

Ac. 2:39 is parallel with Mk. 16:17. This text might appear to say that all believers for all time will have “signs following”? Pentecostals argue that Mk. 16:17 promises miraculous gifts to all baptized believers in perpetuity. However, the context speaks only of those baptized by the apostles and makes no statement about spiritual gifts lasting to the end of time.

Later NT revelation would clarify the scope of God’s promise of the Spirit in both Mk. 16:17 and Ac. 2:39 and show that the promise had limitations based on God’s sovereign purposes for the church.

“There is no mention of disciples in Jerusalem exercising spiritual gifts.”

I would suggest that the evidence strongly goes the other way. Note Peter’s statement in Ac. 5:32:

“And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.” (Acts 5:32)

Those who contend for the dual reception of the Spirit put this passage in the category of the non-miraculous indwelling and parallel it to Ac. 2:38. The two texts are parallel but in the opposite way. Think about this passage in its context.

Peter’s argument is that there are two distinct witnesses to the resurrection of Christ.

(1) *The human testimony of the apostles*

(2) *The divine testimony of the Spirit in those who obey the gospel*

b) Question: How did the Spirit testify of Jesus’ resurrection? Was it not through the miraculous gifts He worked through those who believed in Jesus?

c) Peter argues that this testimony can be seen in “all those who obey Him”. Thus, non-believers could verify that Jesus was alive by the testimony of the Spirit in all who obey Jesus. I suggest that the reference is to the spiritual gifts being

practiced by the Jerusalem church through the laying on the apostle's hands. These gifts among the church could be pointed to by Peter as the Holy Spirit's testimony that Jesus was alive!

Note the criteria for the selection of special servants seems to make having received the Spirit a condition of appointment:

“But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. (Acts 6:3)

An interesting exercise is to look at how Luke has used the expression “filled with the Spirit” up to this point in his narrative. I suggest that it virtually always means “under the Spirit's miraculous power”.

Can't take time to show those uses in Luke and Acts.

Notice what the text says about these named disciples of the apostles.

And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. (Acts 6:8) How and where did Stephen get this outpouring?

And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing. (Acts 8:6) How and where did Phillip get this outpouring?

Consider also Phillip's daughters:

Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. (Acts 21:9) Where did Phillip's daughters get this outpouring?

Consider also Barnabas an early disciple of the apostles in Jerusalem for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord. (Acts 11:24)

Every named disciples of the apostles mentioned by Luke is also said to be “full of the Spirit” and able to work miracles.

Notice the eagerness of the apostles to impart the Spirit to other converts.

An interesting question to ask is, Why would the apostles make the journey to Samaria to lay hands upon the new converts there in order for them to receive the Spirit, but not do that in Jerusalem? Would it be reasonable for them to refrain from imparting the gift of the Spirit to disciples when they could? The attitude of the apostles seems to be to do otherwise. They wanted others to have the gift of the Spirit.

In addition to Paul's efforts in Ephesus, consider his words to the Romans:

For I long to see you in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; (Romans 1:11) Would the attitude of the other apostles be any different?

Conclusion: So when all the evidence is considered it seems to me that Ac. 2:38 and Ac. 5:32 are in full harmony with the other texts that speak about “receiving the gift of the Spirit”. It is best to consider this text as a limited promise to those

who heard the truth at Pentecost and a statement about them, not a prophecy of a “non-miraculous reception of the Spirit” by all believers.