

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (CONT.)

THE SAMARITANS RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT (ACTS 8:4-25)

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

What does it mean that, “the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus?” (Acts 8:16)

Did they receive the gift of the indwelling Spirit before the Apostles laid their hands on them or after?

- If before, then what did they receive from the Apostles?
- If after, then how can we reconcile this with Acts 2:38?

TWO POSSIBILITIES

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS:

- Did these Christians receive miraculous “gifts of the Spirit?” How do we know?
- Did all the Samaritans who were baptized receive miraculous “gifts of the Spirit?”

POSSIBILITY 1: THE INDWELLING SPIRIT AND MIRACULOUS “GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT” GIVEN BY THE APOSTLES

- If this is true, then did all Christians receive the indwelling spirit in this manner? Why was it necessary for the Apostles to travel to Samaria?
- Could this be a special circumstance such as is the case with the Gentiles in Acts 10 & 11? If so, then why was this difference necessary? (Matt 10:5-6; John 4:4-26)

POSSIBILITY 2: MIRACULOUS “GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT” GIVEN BY THE APOSTLES - INDWELLING SPIRIT RECEIVED AFTER BAPTISM

- After their water baptism, were they “in Christ?” If “yes,” then did they have the indwelling Spirit? If “no,” then what else was necessary? (Rom 8:9)

Acts 8:4–25 (ESV)

⁴ Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶ And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was much joy in that city.

⁹ But there was a man named Simon, who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is the power of God that is called Great.” ¹¹ And they paid attention to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. ¹² But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. ¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, “Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” ²⁰ But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” ²⁴ And Simon answered, “Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me.”

²⁵ Now when they had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

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GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

ACTS 2:37–39 (ESV)

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

CORNELIUS' HOUSEHOLD IMMERSSED IN THE SPIRIT. THE POURING OUT LED TO THE GOSPEL BEING INTRODUCED TO THE GENTILES. THIS OCCURRED APPROXIMATELY 10 YEARS AFTER PENTECOST.

Acts 10:44–48 (ESV)

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

PETER DEFENDS HIS ACTIONS BY POINTING OUT THAT THE SPIRIT HAD COME UPON THE GENTILES IN THE SAME WAY AS HE HAD THE APOSTLES IN THE BEGINNING (PENTECOST).

Acts 11:15–18 (ESV)

¹⁵ As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” ¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

- In both instances, the Holy Spirit came from Heaven without any intervention of human agency.
- The baptism in the Spirit of these two groups brought the message of the Gospel to all mankind.
- “Baptism” = word is used to represent the abundant and overwhelming outpouring of the Spirit

SAMARITANS

MATTHEW 10:5–6 (ESV)

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, **“Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**

John 4:4–26 (ESV)

⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, **“Give me a drink.”** ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” **(For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.)** ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, **“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”** ¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?” ¹² Are you

greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.”¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’;¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.”²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

INDWELLING SPIRIT

ROMANS 8:9–11 (ESV)

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

BARNES' NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT (ACTS 8:14-17)

- Albert Barnes

Verse 14. *They sent.* That is, the apostles deputed two of their number. This shows conclusively that there was no *chief* or *ruler* among them. They acted as being equal in authority. The reason why they sent them was, probably, that there would be a demand for more labour than Philip could render; a church was to be founded, which required their presence; and it was important that they should be present to organize it, and to build it up. The *harvest* had occurred in Samaria, of which the Saviour spoke, [John 4:35](#), and it was proper that they should enter into it. In times of revival there is often more to be done than can be done by the regular pastor of a people, and it is proper that he should be aided from abroad.

Peter. This shows that *Peter* had no such authority and primacy as the Roman Catholics claim for him. He exercised no authority of *sending* others, but was himself *sent*. He was appointed by *their* united voice, instead of claiming the power himself of directing them.

And John. Peter was ardent, bold, zealous, rash; John was mild, gentle, tender, persuasive. There was wisdom in uniting them in this work, as the talents of both were needed; and the excellencies in the character of the one would compensate for the defects of the other. It is observable that the apostles sent two together, as the Saviour had himself done. [Mark 6:7](#). The *reasons* why this additional aid was sent to Samaria were probably these:

- (1.) To assist Philip in a great work-in the *harvest* which he was there collecting.
- (2.) To give the *sanction* of the authority of the apostles to what he was doing.
- (3.) To confer on the converts the gift of the Holy Ghost, [Acts 8:17](#).

Verse 15. *Were come down.* To Samaria. Jerusalem was generally represented as *up*, or *higher* than the rest of the land, [Matthew 20:18](#), [John 7:8](#).

Prayed for them. They sought at the hand of God the extraordinary communications of the Holy Spirit. They did not even pretend to have the power of doing it without the aid of God.

That they might receive the Holy Ghost. The main question here is, what was *meant* by the Holy Ghost? In [Acts 8:20](#), it is called "the gift of God." The following remarks may make this plain:

- (1.) It was not that gift of the Holy Ghost by which *the soul is converted*, or *renewed*, for they had this when they believed, [Acts 8:6](#). Everywhere the conversion of the sinner is traced to his influence. Comp. [John 1:13](#).
- (2.) It was not the ordinary influences of the Spirit by which the soul is sanctified; for sanctification is a progressive work, and this was sudden: sanctification is shown by the general tenor of the life; this was sudden and striking.
- (3.) It was something that was discernible by *external effects*; for Simon saw [Acts 8:18](#) that this was done by the laying on of hands.

(4.) The phrase, "the gift of the Holy Ghost," and "the descent of the Holy Ghost," signified not merely his *ordinary* influences in converting sinners, but those *extraordinary* influences that attended the first preaching of the gospel—the power of speaking with new tongues, [Acts 2](#), the power of working miracles, etc., [Acts 19:6](#).

(5.) This is further clear from the fact that Simon wished to *purchase* this power, evidently to keep up his influence among the people, and to retain his ascendancy as a juggler and sorcerer. But surely Simon would not wish to *purchase* the *converting* and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit; it was the power of working miracles. These things make it clear that by the gift of the Holy Spirit here is meant the power of speaking with new tongues, (comp. [1 Corinthians 14](#),) and the power of miracles. And it is further clear that *this* passage should not be adduced in favour of "the rite of confirmation" in the Christian church. For, besides the fact that there are now no apostles, the thing spoken of here is entirely different from that of the rite of confirmation. *This* was to confer the extraordinary power of working miracles; that is for a different purpose.

If it be asked *why* this power was conferred on the early Christians, it may be replied, that it was to furnish striking proof of the truth of the Christian religion; to impress the people, and thus to win them to embrace the gospel. The early church was thus armed with the power of the Holy Spirit; and this extraordinary attestation of God to his message was one cause of the rapid propagation and permanent establishment of the gospel.

(*) "Holy Ghost" "Holy Spirit"

Verse 16. *He was fallen.* This expression is several times applied to the Holy Spirit, [Acts 10:44](#), [11:15](#). It does not differ materially from the common expression, "*the Holy Ghost descended.*" It means that he came from heaven; and the expression *to fall*, applied to his influences, denotes the *rapidity* and *suddenness* of his coming. Comp. [Acts 19:2](#).

In the name of the Lord Jesus. [Acts 2:38](#). See also [Acts 10:48](#), [19:5,6](#).

(*) "as yet" [Acts 19:2](#)

(*) "were baptized" [Acts 2:38](#), [10:48](#), [19:5,6](#), [1 Corinthians 1:13](#)

(*) "in the name" "unto"

Verse 17. *Then laid they their hands*, etc. This was an act of prayer, expressing an invocation to God that he would impart the blessing to *them*. On *how many* they laid their hands is not said. It is evident that it was not on *all*, for they did not thus lay hands on Simon. Perhaps it was done on a few of the more prominent and leading persons, who were to be employed particularly in bearing witness to the truth of the gospel. It was customary to lay the hands on any person when a *favour* was to be conferred, or a blessing imparted. [Matthew 9:18](#).

(*) "laid they their hands" [Acts 6:5](#), [Hebrews 6:2](#)

(*) "Holy Ghost" "Holy Spirit"¹

¹ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*, ed. Robert Frew, WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 8".

ADAM CLARKE'S COMMENTARY (ACTS 8:14-17)

- Adam Clarke

Acts 8:14

The word of God—The doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They sent unto them Peter and John—There was no individual ruler among the apostles—there was not even a president of the council; and Peter, far from being chief of the apostles, is one of those sent, with the same commission and authority as John, to confirm the Samaritans in the faith.

Acts 8:15

When they were come down—The very same mode of speaking, in reference to Jerusalem formerly, obtains now in reference to London. The metropolis in both cases is considered as the centre; and all parts, in every direction, no matter how distant, or how situated, are represented as below the metropolis. Hence we so frequently hear of persons going up to Jerusalem: and going down from the same. So in London the people speak of going down to the country; and, in the country, of going up to London. It is necessary to make this remark, lest any person should be led away with the notion that Jerusalem was situated on the highest ground in Palestine. It is a mode of speech which is used to designate a royal or imperial city.

Prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost—It seems evident from this case, that even the most holy deacons, though full of the Holy Ghost themselves, could not confer this heavenly gift on others. This was the prerogative of the apostles, and they were only instruments; but they were those alone by which the Lord chose to work. They prayed and laid their hands on the disciples, and God sent down the gift; so, the blessing came from God by the apostles, and not from the apostles to the people. But for what purpose was the Holy Spirit thus given? Certainly not for the sanctification of the souls of the people: this they had on believing in Christ Jesus; and this the apostles never dispensed. It was the miraculous gifts of the Spirit which were thus communicated: the speaking with different tongues, and those extraordinary qualifications which were necessary for the successful preaching of the Gospel; and doubtless many, if not all, of those on whom the apostles laid their hands, were employed more or less in the public work of the Church.

Acts 8:17

Then laid they their hands on them—Probably only on some select persons, who were thought proper for public use in the Church. They did not lay hands on all; for certainly no hands in this way were laid on Simon.²

² Adam Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary*, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1826), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts".

A COMMENTARY ON ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (GOSPEL ADVOCATE) – ACTS 8:14-17

- H. Leo Boles

14 Now when the apostles that were at Jerusalem—The apostles were still at Jerusalem, though the church had been scattered. The apostles heard the good news of the success that Philip had in Samaria, and it was thought best to send someone there with apostolic authority to encourage and confer on the believers some extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit; so Peter and John were sent. It must have been an occasion of rejoicing on the part of the apostles when they heard that the Samaritans had received the gospel of Christ. ([Matt. 10:5](#); [Acts 1:8](#).) It should be noticed that the apostles "sent" Peter and John as their messengers; it will be recalled also that John had at one time sought to call down fire on a Samaritan village. ([Luke 9:54](#).)

15 who, when they were come down,—Peter and John went down to Samaria and prayed for the disciples there; they prayed "that they might receive the Holy Spirit" There were special gifts of the Holy Spirit which could be given by the apostles; these gifts would confirm the disciples in the faith. Sometimes they were imparted by the laying on of hands. These gifts are to be distinguished from the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

16 for as yet it was fallen upon none of them:—"It was fallen upon" none of them; "pneuma" is the word for "spirit" here, and the translation should be "he," rather than "it"; it is not a correct form to use "it" for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead and is a personality, or spiritual being; Jesus frequently referred to him with the personal pronoun and the masculine gender. ([John 14:16, 17](#); [15:26](#); [16:13, 14](#).) These Samaritans had only been "baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus"; hence, they had received remission of sins, but had not received a miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit.

17 Then laid they their hands on them,—The laying on of hands did not occur at Pentecost ([Acts 2:4, 33](#)) nor in [Acts 10:44](#); these were baptisms of the Holy Spirit, and were administered by the Lord; the Holy Spirit given by the laying on of hands was a measure of the Holy Spirit not so full as the baptism. Some have concluded that the Holy Spirit in its miraculous form could be given only by the apostles; hence, Peter and John had to go to Samaria. We do not know that all who believed in Samaria received this miraculous endowment of the Holy Spirit; neither do we know whether Simon received this measure. Some have concluded that Simon and all the believers in Samaria had hands laid on them and a miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon them, but the evidence is not clear and does not warrant such a conclusion.³

³ H. Leo Boles, *New Testament Commentary – A Commentary on Acts of the Apostles*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1989), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 130-131.

A COMMENTARY-CRITICAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND PRACTICAL ON THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS (ACTS 8:15-16)

- Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown

Notes for Verses 15, 16

Verses 15, 16. prayed... they might receive the Holy Ghost. (For only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus)—As the baptism of adults presupposed "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" ([Titus 3:5-7](#); [1Cor 12:13](#)), of which the profession of faith had to be taken for evidence, this communication of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the apostles' hands was clearly a *superadded* thing; and as it was only *occasional*, so it was invariably *attended with miraculous manifestations* (see [Ac 10:44](#), where it followed Peter's preaching; and [Ac 19:1-7](#), where, as here, it followed the laying on of hands). In the present case an important object was served by it—"the sudden appearance of a body of baptized disciples in Samaria, by the agency of one who was not an apostle, requiring the presence and power of apostles to perform their special part as the divinely appointed founders of the Church" [ALFORD]. Beautiful, too, was the spectacle exhibited of Jew and Samaritan, one in Christ.⁴

⁴ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, (Toledo, OH: Jerome B. Names & Co., 1884), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 8".

A COMMENTARY ON ACTS OF APOSTLES (ACTS 8:14-17)

-J.W. McGarvey

14–17. Before recording the sequel of Simon's case, Luke introduces an incident, which, on account of its singularity in New Testament history, demands very careful consideration. (14) *“Now when the apostles, who were in Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John; (15) who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. (16) For as yet he had fallen upon none of them, only they were immersed into the name of the Lord Jesus. (17) Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”*

It would be useless to encumber these pages with the many unsatisfactory explanations of this procedure with which commentaries abound. We will be content with a simple effort to learn what it teaches, by a careful consideration of the facts. We notice, then, *first*, That the Samaritans had believed the gospel, and been immersed. They were, then, according to the commission, and according to Peter's answer on Pentecost, pardoned, and in possession of that “gift of the Holy Spirit,” which was promised on condition of repentance and immersion. *Second*, After they had been in possession of this gift, for a period sufficient for the news to reach Jerusalem, the whole body of the apostles united in sending to them Peter and John. *Third*, Previous to the arrival of Peter and John, none of them had received the *miraculous* gift of the Spirit. *Fourth*, Upon the imposition of hands by the two apostles, accompanied with prayers, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, conferring miraculous gifts. From these facts we may draw several conclusions. 1st. Whatever other objects may have been contemplated in the mission of the two apostles, such as confirming the faith of the disciples, and assisting Philip in his labors, it is quite certain that the chief object was the impartation of the Holy Spirit. What they did when they arrived in Samaria was certainly the object for which they went. But the chief thing which they did was to confer the Holy Spirit; hence, this was the chief object of their visit. If, however, *Philip* could have conferred this gift, the mission, so far as the chief object of it is concerned, would have been *useless*. This affords strong evidence that the miraculous gift of the Spirit was bestowed by no human hands except those of the apostles. That such was the conclusion of Simon, who was an interested witness of this proceeding, is evident from the proposition he made to Peter, to purchase from him this power. If all who had the Spirit could impart it to others, he need only to have sought the gift himself, knowing that this would include the power to impart it. But his offer to buy this power, and that from an apostle, shows that the apostles alone possessed the power of imparting the Spirit. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that in the only other instance of the kind recorded in Acts, that of the twelve disciples in Ephesus, the same gift was bestowed by the hands of an apostle.

The case of Timothy is no exception, as has been supposed, to this conclusion; for, although Paul states that the gift which was in him was given him through prophesy and “the laying on of the hands of the eldership;” yet he exhorts him, in the second epistle, “Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee, by the putting on of *my* hands.” These two statements can be reconciled either by supposing that Paul refers to the gift of *office* in the former, and the gift of the *Spirit* in the latter; or, that the eldership united with Paul in laying on hands, while it was the apostolic part of the service which imparted the Spirit, the eldership participating, because at the same time he was ordained to the work of an evangelist.

2d. From the fact that these disciples enjoyed pardon and membership in the Church before receiving the miraculous gift, it is evident that this gift was not necessary to the enjoyment of either of these blessings. Yet, strange to say, the mystic power of an ultra spiritualism has thrown these plain facts into the utmost confusion in the minds of some great men. Witness the following from Neander, in reference

to the condition of the Samaritans previous to the visit of Peter and John. "They had not yet attained the consciousness of a vital communion with the Christ whom Philip preached, nor yet to the consciousness of a *personal divine life*. The *indwelling* of the Spirit was as yet something *foreign* to them, known only by the wonderful operation which they saw taking place around them." This assertion is evidently in direct conflict with the commission, and with the promise of Peter, that those who would repent and be immersed should *receive the gift* of the Holy Spirit. Paul also teaches that the indwelling of the Spirit is characteristic of all who are Christ's; and certainly all are Christ's who have been immersed into the name of Christ, as had been these Samaritans.

3d. The statement that "as yet he had fallen on none of them, only they were immersed into the name of the Lord Jesus," thrown in parenthetically in explanation of the mission of Peter and John, necessarily implies that there was no such connection between immersion into Christ and the miraculous gift of the Spirit, as that the latter might be inferred from the former. This gift, then, was not common to the disciples, but was enjoyed only by those to whom it was specifically imparted.

Seeing that this extraordinary gift of the Spirit was not necessary to the conversion and pardon of these parties, nor to the indwelling of the Spirit, it is proper to inquire for what purpose it was bestowed. We have already observed, in commenting on [Acts 1:8](#), that the design of bestowing it upon the apostles was to endow them, intellectually, with power to establish the kingdom, and to furnish miraculous attestation of their mission. In general, miracles were designed to indicate the divine sanction of the procedure with which they were connected; but when the miracle assumed a mental form, it was designed to qualify the party for some mental labor. The young Church in Samaria had hitherto been guided by the infallible teaching of Philip, and more recently, by that of Peter and John. But these brethren must, in executing their high commission, soon depart to other fields of labor. If, in doing so, they should leave the Church in the condition in which Peter and John found it, there would be no means left them of increasing their knowledge of the new institution, and none but their uncertain memories of retaining with accuracy what they had already learned. To supply this defect, chiefly, and secondarily, to leave among them the means of convincing unbelievers, the gift of inspiration was bestowed—not upon all the disciples, for this is not necessarily implied in the text, but upon a sufficient number of chosen individuals. For further information upon the design of such gifts, I refer the reader to the [twelfth and fourteenth chapters of First Corinthians](#). A complete discussion of the subject would belong to a commentary on that epistle, rather than to one on Acts. Suffice it here to add, that these gifts, served as a temporary provision, until the facts, doctrine, commandments, and promises of the new covenant were committed to writing by inspired men, when the prophesies, tongues, and miraculous knowledge of individual teachers gave place to the written record.⁵

⁵ J. W. McGarvey, *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles, with a Revised Version of the Text*, Seventh Edition ed. (Lexington, KY: Transylvania Printing and Publishing, 1872), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts VIII".

COFFMAN'S COMMENTARIES ON THE BIBLE - ACTS 8:14-17

-James Burton Coffman

Verse 14

NOW WHEN THE APOSTLES THAT WERE AT JERUSALEM HEARD THAT SAMARIA HAD RECEIVED THE WORD OF GOD, THEY SENT UNTO THEM PETER AND JOHN.

The purpose of this apostolic mission to Samaria was evidently to qualify certain men for leadership through the laying on of the apostles' hands and the accompanying endowment of them with miraculous powers.

Significantly, Peter does not appear in this passage as any kind of pope or authority sending others to do his bidding, but as himself "sent" by others.

Verse 15

Who when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then laid they their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

That they might receive the Holy Spirit ... has reference to receiving the Holy Spirit in miraculous measure, because, having been baptized, they had already received the gift ordinary of the Holy Spirit as Peter promised on Pentecost ([Acts 2:38](#)).

Fallen upon none of them ... means that none of them had received such miraculous powers as had been conferred upon the Twelve on Pentecost. As Don DeWalt noted, "Luke used the term 'fallen upon' to describe the reception of the special powers."^[26]

Then laid they their hands upon them ... The special power of the Holy Spirit in view in this passage was conveyed only through the laying on of the hands of the apostles. Plumptre was correct in seeing the gift here as:

Distinct from the new birth of water and the Spirit ([John 3:5](#)) which was given through baptism. The apostles looked on the Samaritans as qualified for the higher gift as well for admission into the kingdom; and it was given to them, and not to Philip ... to be the channels of communicating it.^[27]

Significantly, although Philip himself possessed this higher gift of ability to perform mighty signs, the whole narrative at this place makes it clear that Philip did not have the ability to communicate this gift to others. Therefore, this was a plenary, not a self-perpetuating ability. Only the apostles could convey it; and when the last man died upon whom the apostles had laid hands, the age of miracles expired by limitation. This commentator has no patience with the rejection of conclusions of this kind because "they are merely deductions." As a matter of fact all faith and holy religion are matters of "deduction," the great deduction being that the apostles delivered the truth to mankind. It is simply unbelievable that if Philip could have conveyed such a gift, Simon would not have tried to buy it of him, rather than of the apostles.

Benson was evidently correct in his deduction that not all of the Samaritans received miraculous powers. He said:

Not that all who had been baptized in Samaria might receive miraculous gifts; for it was never so in any church, not even in Jerusalem; but that some might receive ... for the confirmation of the gospel, and especially such as were designed for office in the church, or to be eminently active members of it.^[28]

As Bruce noted, "The context leaves us in no doubt that their reception of the Holy Spirit was attended by external manifestations."^[29] If this had not been the case, Simon would not have been able to "see" that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the gift was given, as declared in [Acts 8:18](#). Bruce also distinguished this special gift from that which all Christians have, saying, "It seems to be assumed in the New Testament that those who believe and are baptized have also the Spirit of God."^[30] Since there is no way for any person to "see" that this gift ordinary is received, the distinction between the two gifts is a certainty. Moreover, as McGarvey observed: "If Philip could have conferred this gift, the mission (of the apostles) would have been useless so far as its chief purpose was concerned."^[31]

^[26] Ibid., p. 109.

^[27] E. H. Plumptre, op. cit., p. 50.

^[28] Joseph Benson, One Volume Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1972), in loco.

^[29] F. F. Bruce, The Book of Acts (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishers, 1950) p. 181.

^[30] Ibid., p. 182.

^[31] J. W. McGarvey, op. cit., p. 142.⁶

⁶ Coffman, James Burton. "Commentary on [Acts 8:4](#)". "Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament". "www.study-light.org/commentaries/bcc/acts-8.html". Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. 1983-1999.