

Infilling Disparities Contrasted

The question of why some readily receive the gift of the Holy Ghost while others agonize over longer periods of time has long been a puzzle to many. Of the recorded instances of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, the most curious are the spontaneous infilling of Acts 2:4 and Acts 10:44 contrasted with the delayed infilling of Acts 8:16-17.

The Gospel message of Acts 2:38 preached and obeyed would seemingly place a “seeker” in a prime position to readily receive the promise of the Divine gift. However, all of us have seen the agonizing labor of those who, for a plethora of varied reasons, have a harder time of breaking through to that moment.

In Acts 2, the 120 seekers were part of an extended prayer meeting in Jerusalem that had been Divinely ordered. It seems that after days of prayer all of them were ready for the day of Pentecost to fully come! “One mind and one accord,” describes that they were unified in their purpose for a singular objective. Finally, God poured out the promised spiritual gift in a magnificent way—the evidence of tongues clearly manifested.

There are similarities to the account of Acts chapter 2 that are also described in Acts chapter 10.

First, like the 120 in Jerusalem, it’s apparent that Cornelius was extremely hungry for God in his city of Caesarea. A second similarity—the evidence of that hunger was shown by his consistent habit of prayer. This penchant for prayer led to such a deep relationship with God, that an angelic visitation was Divinely ordered. The angel clearly acknowledged the prayers and alms of this devout Roman gentile. James 5:16 would fully describe the spirituality of his household, as the “effectual, fervent prayer” of this good man availed mightily! Through the visiting angel, God Himself acknowledged the “memorial” that Cornelius had built up in Heaven and it’s more than perceivable that his pronounced spiritual hunger pervaded this Italian household.

By Divine appointment, Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius there in Caesarea. Following preliminary events the Holy Ghost fell while Peter was still preaching. There was no altar call. There was no plea for repentance or laying on of hands. Without any prompting, the souls of this gentile household received the gift of the Holy Ghost! “For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.” - Acts 10:46.

The similarity between the Jerusalem experience and the Caesarea experience are obvious. Prayer! Though Cornelius wasn’t Jewish, he had somehow realized the importance of prayer and his household had apparently moved into a spiritually repentant posture. The irrefutable evidence? Peter heard them speak in other tongues. However, these two instances of Acts chapter 2 and chapter 10 are strikingly different from the Samaritan experience.

In the account of the Samaritans of Acts chapter 8, Philip the evangelist is having revival! People are being delivered and healed. Great joy breaks out! They've even obeyed the message and have been baptized in Jesus' name according to Acts 8:16. But there was something deeply wrong. There was no evidence of an infilling. They had "joy", even "great joy", but there was still no evidence. These new-birth candidates were having great difficulty and had not received the gift of the Holy Ghost. Was it a lack of repentance? Was it a vexation? Whatever it was, scripture indicates that the spiritual influence of Simon the sorcerer was very great. These Samaritans had been so deeply affected that it posed a desperate need for "altar" work. Thankfully, Philip didn't give up. Instead of being satisfied with miracles and joy, he knew that these Samaritans still needed to be "born of the Spirit" in order to fulfill the commands of John 3:5 and Acts 2:38. Instead of walking away from the situation, he called for the two disciples that were among the closest to the Savior. Peter and John arrived and the Samaritan "seekers" finally got their personal breakthrough. Acts 8:17 records the desired result: "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." Given the age that we live in today, Brother Philip's experience seems more the norm than the exception.

It should be no surprise to any Apostolic minister that these accounts show that the infilling of the Holy Ghost must always be preceded by repentance. This is contrary to the modern faux, grace-alone, all-is-love doctrines. These scriptural examples reinforce what we already know. For a true infilling of the Holy Ghost, if the evidence is not obvious and clear, a season of soul searching prayer is in order. Prayer and repentance. Repentance and prayer. Prayer was substantiated by the 120. It was further substantiated by the resolve of brother Cornelius. The two elements of repentance and prayer, reinforced by a needed time of fasting opens the door to hearts that nothing else will.

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