

Jesus - Baptiser in the Spirit

study 2

Introduction

In this study, we're going to see what the gospels say about Jesus and the long promised Holy Spirit. You'll remember that the prophets kept reminding smashed and battered Israel of the need to turn back to God with all their heart and soul... and that when they did that, he'd restore them and "circumcise their hearts." In the words of Ezekiel 36, God promised to replace their heart of stone with a heart of flesh... "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

By the start of the New Testament, that still hasn't happened. Sure, Israelites had drifted back to the promised land over the last few hundred years. But their **hearts hadn't changed**. And they continued to live under the harsh oppression of foreign rule.

Revise

According to Deuteronomy 30:1-6, what did the Israelites need to do if they wanted to enjoy God's blessing, and renewed hearts?

The prophet **Isaiah** also spoke about the "end of the exile" when Israel would be blessed again. When the time came for that to happen, there would be a messenger to announce it.

Read Luke 3:1-18.

- a) What's the name of the "messenger" who has come to "prepare the way for the Lord"?
- b) What was this messenger preaching (v3) - and why isn't this surprising?
- c) Crowds of Israelites stream into the desert to hear John and be baptised. But there's more to "repentance" than just words and a bit of water. What do they really need to do? (v8, 10-14)
- d) According to John, Israel is at a turning point. What danger do they face if they don't repent? (v8-9, 17)
- e) Some of the crowd wonders if John is "the Christ." What is his response?
- f) How does John describe Jesus, and his mission? (v16-17)

Remember the words of Ezekiel? He promised that God would wash Israel with clean water... by putting his Spirit on them. John says, the one who's going to make it happen is just around the corner. **Jesus** is the one who's going to *baptise* (which literally just means *wash*) you with **the Holy Spirit**. But be careful. Because he's also the one who'll baptise with fire - and if Israel rejects God's offer this time, it's the end of the line.

What are we doing here?

If you missed study 1 in this series, here's the game-plan. We're tracing the doctrine of "the Holy Spirit" right through the Bible's story-line. Last week, we took a fast trip from Genesis 1 through to the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. This week, we're looking at the opening stages of the New Testament.



Think about it...

Take a look at what happens in Luke 3:21-22. It seems odd - Jesus is baptised like the rest of the Israelites. If you're wondering what it's all about, here's a clue. Jesus is showing himself to be the perfect model of the returning Israelite. He's the one who finally does what Israel always should have done!
And - exactly as promised - he receives the Spirit.

More Prayer, More Spirit?

With these thoughts in mind, it's time to take a fresh look at a well known passage. Before we do, try this quick quiz.

- a) Do you think some Christians can have more of God's Spirit than other Christians?
- b) If so, do you think it's true that if praying more is one of the secrets to accessing to more of God's Spirit? Can you think of a bible passage that suggests this may be true?

Read Luke 11:1-13.

- a) What do you think this passage is about? Is it about *prayer* in general, or something more specific?
- b) If you try reading this passage again in the light of *Israel's story so far*, does it make any difference?
- c) What is the main thing the disciples are told to ask for in the abbreviated Lord's prayer? What do you think this means?
- d) Re-read verses 5 to 9. What exactly is it that the disciples should be hammering on God's door for, and asking for with such boldness?
- e) Now read verses 10 to 13. Does this help answer the previous question?

It's not unusual to hear Christians say "Pray more, and you'll get more of God's Spirit." And they'll often be saying it on the basis of Luke 11:13 - "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*" But that's not what the passage is about.

Notice, the verse doesn't say, "How much God will give *more Holy Spirit* to those who ask him." The context of these words is very important. Jesus is telling his disciples what they should be praying for... because his mission is to bring it about. He's the one who's going to **baptise with the Holy Spirit**, and so bring God's blessing back to his people. He's the one who's come to call Israel back to faithfulness, and so bring about God's Kingdom in all it's promised blessing.

In other words, when Jesus tells them to pray that God will give the Spirit, **the long promised pouring out of the Spirit hadn't yet come**. They should be longing for it, praying for, hammering on God's door and pleading for it... because the pouring out of the Spirit which will change people's hearts is what Israel needed more than anything else in the world. They need a new heart!

When are we going to get there?

It's been a long journey... but the goal is just around the corner. Luke (and the other gospels) tell the story of Jesus single-handedly fulfilling what Israel was always meant to be, and meant to do. Here at last is a "returning" Israel committed heart and soul to doing God's will.

More than that, Jesus dies at the hands of Israel's oppressors, and takes the penalty for sin on himself once and for all. Through his sacrifice, God "forgives their wickedness and remembers their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31) and "saves them from all their uncleanness" (Ezek 36). Everything that needs to be done, has been done. **So surely, now is the time God said he would give them new hearts by pouring out His Spirit?**

The book of Acts was written by Luke - it's actually "Luke Part 2." Jesus has been crucified, and is now risen. And finally, we're about to reach the climax of the story. **Read Acts 1:4-8.**

- a) What does Jesus tell the disciples to wait for?
- b) How does their question fit with your understanding of "the story so far"?
- c) How does the answer Jesus gives in verse 8 expand their vision and their expectation?

Re-gathering God's People!

God had promised the Spirit to **His people Israel**. But there's a surprise in store. Jesus has just commissioned his disciples to go not just to Israel, but to **all the world!** When God's Spirit comes, the distinction between the Jews and everyone else will be washed away. The prophet Joel had given a hint of this when he said, "*In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*"

First, though, there's some re-gathering of lost Israelites to be done.

In Acts 2, the long awaited Holy Spirit finally comes on the apostles in a dramatic way! This is the moment we've been waiting for since Deuteronomy 30. So let's see what happens.

Read Acts 2:1-13.

The timing is fascinating. **The Spirit arrives just when Jerusalem is crowded with "God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven."** (v5) These are descendants of the Jews that were scattered into the nations because of God's judgement. Remember the promise in Deuteronomy 30:1-6? "*Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back. ...The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.*"

- a) What visible evidence is there that the Holy Spirit has come at last? (v3)
- b) As the apostles are filled with the Holy Spirit, they can suddenly - and quite miraculously - speak in other languages. Why? (See verses 5 to 12)

Peter makes a long speech to the crowd in Acts 2:14-41. He tells them that the days fore-told by the prophets had finally arrived. The Holy Spirit had finally come. Now you didn't need to be a prophet to know God's mind - the Spirit was available to everyone! (Much to everyone's surprise, as the story unfolds in Acts, that "everyone" includes the Gentiles.)

- c) How does Peter summarise what's happened in verse 33?

d) When the people hear this, they are **cut to the heart!** At last! (Remember Deuteronomy 30? That's exactly what was the Israelites were meant to be!) What does Peter tell them they must to do (v37)?

What will the result be?

The Spirit Filled Church

The results of Peter's speech are immediate and dramatic. Thousands are added to the small group of disciples.

Read Acts 2:42-47 for a description of life in this first ever church. The Spirit has changed their hearts! Here's a group of people brought together from every nation under heaven... and suddenly, they're a family, selling, sharing and giving with "**glad and sincere hearts.**" At the same time, the apostles are doing many miraculous signs and wonders, confirming their authority as genuine ambassadors of Jesus Christ. No wonder everyone is "devoted to the apostles' teaching." (We should be too. We have their teaching preserved in the New Testament.)

a) As well as being devoted to the apostle's teaching, what else was this first church devoted to?

b) Look back to your previous ideas of what a "Spirit filled church" would look like. How did your earlier thoughts compare with the picture in Acts 2?

c) Measured against this description, does our church show signs of God's Spirit at work in:-

our commitment to the apostles' teaching? (v42)

our commitment to prayer? (v42)

our commitment to fellowship and regularly meeting together? (v42, 46)

our commitment to sharing meals together in our homes? (v42, 46)

our commitment to supporting those in need? (v45)

our glad and sincere hearts? (v46)

So who are God's People NOW?

As the book of Acts unfolds, there's a huge surprise. Gentile - non-Jews - also believing in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. It's the start of a huge debate (which you can see in detail in Acts 15.) The "circumcised hearts" that want to do what God wants... aren't just Jewish hearts! Now, the Spirit that the

prophets said would write God's law on human hearts, has done exactly that. Many Jews disagree, and want to impose the Old Testament law on Gentile converts. But Paul puts it this way in Romans 2:28-29, and Philippians 3:3

:

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is **circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit**, not by the written code... For it is **we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God**, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.

There are no second class citizens... and there's no secret recipe for getting "more of the Spirit" either. Repent, put your faith in Jesus, and God starts rebuilding your heart. But Paul later tells the Galatian Christians that they need to "keep in step with the Spirit" - which is sometimes a battle, because our "flesh" keeps wanting something else. We'll see more of that in a future study. In the meantime, let's keep in step with the Spirit as a church... by following the prompting of our "new hearts."

For reflection:

Do *you* have God's Spirit? If so, how?

What evidence do you look for of God's Spirit at work in your life, and in our church?