

the person of Cornelius and his house at Caesarea, Paul could truthfully write: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized [*i.e.*, incorporated] into one body, *whether Jews or Greeks*, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13).

Again, we have learned that the Holy Spirit is a Person. How, then, would it have been possible for God to pour out one person upon another person or upon a multitude of persons? The meaning is, of course, that God would pour out the *graces, gifts and influences* of the Spirit, upon people of all races and nationalities, without regard longer to distinction between Gentile and Jew. The Spirit, a Person, is one thing; His gifts, graces and influences are another. The prophet is writing here of the gifts and influences of the Spirit which would attend the Spirit's advent and follow His assumption of His official duties as the Vicegerent of the Godhead upon earth. In Old Testament times, the Spirit was given only partially and intermittently to certain individuals chosen of God, and for purposes of inspiration, demonstration and leadership. These were in a sense just "drops" of Spirit-power. But, according to Joel's prophecy, there would be a general outpouring of the Spirit's powers and influences—in varying measures, of course, for corresponding ends—upon obedient believers of all nations, with the accompanying promise that whosoever should call upon the name of the Lord should be saved. Cf. Acts 5:12, with reference to the *name* (authority) of Christ: "In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we *must* be saved," that is, if saved at all Jesus Himself said: "No one cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). All this becomes very clear in the light of New Testament teaching.

#### 4. The Promise of John the Baptizer

On further investigation we find that the message of John the Baptizer included something about the Holy Spirit and what is called the "baptism" of the Holy Spirit. According to Matthew, John said: "Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones

to raise up children unto Abraham. And even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: *he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire*: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:8-12). (Cf. Mark 1:7-8, Luke 3:7-14, 16-17). Cf. the testimony of the Baptizer as given in John 1:33—"And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize in water, he said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, the same is he that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit." Here we have the first mention in Scripture of Holy Spirit baptism. John declares in substance that whereas he had been sent to administer baptism in water "unto repentance," the One who was to come after him, the Messiah, should administer Holy Spirit baptism and baptism of fire. "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire."

Now *to whom* was John speaking when he made these statements? In the first place, he was preaching to an audience made up entirely of Jews. In the second place it was an audience made up of all classes, not only as to occupation and social status, but also with respect to their response to his message. 1. It consisted of a great many Jews who would accept his teaching and be baptized by him in the river Jordan confessing their sins. 2. Among the number who accepted John's message and baptism were a few men who would later be called to become Apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is evident from Peter's words in Acts 1:21-22: here the Apostle states expressly that the person elected to take the place of the fallen Judas had to be a man who had companied with the disciples beginning from the baptism of John: "Of the men therefore that have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection." *The implication here is very clear, namely, that the Twelve who were called to the Apostleship, including Matthias who was selected to take the place of*

Judas, were among those who accepted the message and baptism of John the Baptizer. Paul, of course, was especially called and qualified "through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12) to become the Lord's Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, 26:17). 3. John's audience included also many Jews—Pharisees, lawyers, scribes, etc.—who rejected the counsel of God by refusing his (John's) baptism (Luke 7:30). To sum up: John's audience was divided roughly into three classes: (1) those who became his disciples, (2) those who became Apostles of Christ, and (3) those who remained unbelieving and disobedient.

Now it is a fundamental law of interpretation that "in oral discourse, the persons indicated by pronouns of the second person are always present with the speaker."<sup>1</sup> To whom, then, was John speaking when he said, "He shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and in fire"? John was speaking to a multitude of Jews, some of whom were to receive Holy Spirit baptism, others of whom were to suffer the baptism of fire. Can these words spoken by John rightly be applied to other persons than those present at the time he uttered them? I hardly think so. Two questions arise, therefore, at this point: (1) Which of the groups that comprised his audience was to receive Holy Spirit baptism? and (2) Which was to suffer the baptism of fire? The answer to the first question will become obvious as we proceed with our study. The second question is not properly a part of this study, but it might be well, in view of the confusion that has prevailed on the subject, to give it some attention in passing.

My personal opinion is that John's reference to a baptism of fire had two applications: 1. *It had a local application.* "And even now the axe lieth at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Had John not just exhorted his hearers to "bring forth fruit worthy of repentance"? It must be remembered that John's message was addressed primarily to the Jewish nation; hence his exhortation to repentance was likewise addressed to the Jewish nation. Was not the whole Jewish nation one of those "trees" which had failed to bring forth good fruit unto God? Had not its history been that of repeated rebellion and apostasy? Would it not soon perpetrate its most heinous crime, that of rejecting and crucifying the Messiah-

1. T. W. Brents, *The Gospel Plan of Salvation*, p. 578.

Redeemer of the world? Even then, as John spoke these words, the doom of the nation was, little by little, being sealed; the axe was being laid to the root of the tree. It would not be long until the streets of the sacred city would resound with the tread of conquering hosts. It would not be long until Jerusalem would be trodden down by the Gentiles, for her rejection of the Lord's Anointed. It was only some forty years after these words were spoken by John that they were literally fulfilled, when the Roman legions laid siege to the city, captured it, broke down the walls in many places, pillaged and destroyed the Temple, and scattered the inhabitants among all nations. "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, and the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire." The baptism of fire, which John foretold, was evidently, in its local application, the judgment which overtook Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. 2. *John's reference to the baptism of fire has also a general application.* It refers, undoubtedly, to the punishment which shall overtake the wicked and unbelieving on the Day of Judgment. The Messiah's Reign is one of sifting, garnering, and casting aside. The time of ignorance God winked at, but now He commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). "Except ye repent," said Jesus, "ye shall all in like manner perish" (Luke 13:3). All those who reject the testimony of the Spirit respecting the Messiah will eventually have to pay for their unbelief. In the finality of things, the wheat will be gathered into the garner, but the chaff will be burned with unquenchable fire. When shall this take place? "At the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess. 1:7-9). "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. . . . Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:34, 41). For all apostates, we are told, "there remaineth no more a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judg-

ment, and a fierceness of fire which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26-27). Rev. 20:15—"And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." From these Scriptures it is quite evident that all those who rejected the counsel of God by refusing John's baptism were to suffer the baptism of fire; and undoubtedly the wicked, the irreligious, the unsaved, of all ages will suffer the same retribution. Jesus, as Judge of the living and the dead (Rom. 14:9) will administer this baptism.

Fire, quite generally throughout the Bible, is a symbol of judgment, punishment, destruction. Even in cases in which fire is said to purify, it does so by *consuming* the chaff, dross, etc. I cannot recall a single passage in the New Testament in which fire denotes a spiritual blessing conferred upon the righteous; nor is there a single instance in which fire, or the baptism of fire, denotes a purifying work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. Fire is the symbol, not of purification, but of judgment. It is connected with punishments, judgments, fiery darts of the wicked one, devouring adversaries, consuming indignation and hate, the devil, and hell itself; but in no case is it associated with the idea of God's love, compassion, or holiness, or God's power as exerted in the Gospel Plan of Salvation for the redemption of men. Even the tongues of Pentecost were not tongues of fire, but tongues "like as of fire" (Acts 2:3); these tongues, moreover, symbolized the Word of God, the standard by which all men are to be judged ultimately (Rev. 20:12). They were "cloven" tongues or tongues "parting asunder," and so the Word, which is the sharp two-edged Sword of the Spirit, is a Sword which cuts both ways, and becomes, to him who hears it, either a savor of life unto life or of death unto death (cf. Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12, Rev. 1:16, 2 Cor. 2:16). And as "the sound of the rushing of a mighty wind" and "tongues parting asunder, like as of fire" came together on Pentecost, the former symbolizing the Spirit and the latter the Word, so again we have confirmation of the great truth that God's Spirit and His Word go together, act together, and together realize His purposes in the world. And so, on Pentecost, the Spirit brought the Word of the Gospel to men: on that day the facts, commands and promises of the Gospel were proclaimed for the first time. Fire is *not* a symbol of purification in Scripture; it is the symbol, rather of de-

struction, of punishment. In view of these facts it becomes evident that those misguided religionists who would lay claim to the baptism of fire, who petition the Lord to "send down fire from heaven" upon them, simply do not comprehend the import of their prayers. I, for one, certainly have no desire to receive the baptism of fire. On the contrary, I pray God that I may escape it.

Moreover, we shall learn as we proceed with our study that not even Holy Spirit baptism is described in Scripture as having been administered for purposes of salvation or purification, or as having any necessary connection with the works of regeneration and sanctification. Holy Spirit baptism, like most outpourings of the Spirit in unusual measure, was connected primarily with the works of inspiration and demonstration.

To summarize: John was preaching to a mixed audience, which included one group of men who would later be called to the Apostleship, would nevertheless accept John's teaching and baptism and thus join the ranks of his disciples; and a third class consisting of those who would reject the counsel of God by refusing John's baptism altogether. It was this third class who were to suffer the baptism of fire, as the Divine Judgment to be inflicted upon all the unbelieving and disobedient. We shall investigate further to ascertain which group it was that was destined to receive Holy Spirit baptism.

The principal truth to be derived from John's words, however, has reference neither to the *subjects*, nor to the *design*, of Holy Spirit baptism, but to the Administrator of it. John declares explicitly that Holy Spirit baptism, no matter what it was, or what its effects were, or upon whom it was bestowed, could be administered only by the Messiah Himself. It could not be administered by any human instrumentality, but only by the Lord, the Head of the Church. It was to come directly from Heaven, as we shall see later, in fulfilment of a Divine Promise,—the Promise of the Spirit. The overall import of John's words is too clear for misinterpretation, namely, that the Messiah Himself would be the Administrator, both of Holy Spirit baptism and of the baptism of fire.

##### 5. The Promise of the Comforter

"In interpreting Scripture," writes Z. T. Sweeney, "attention should be paid not only to the speaker and his message,