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In Acts 1:5, we have a promise, "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." When John the Baptist said, "You shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit," they immediately thought of an earthly kingdom. The mind of an old covenant person is always on earthly things. Even when many Christians say, "God has blessed me," they usually mean that He has blessed them materially "with money, or a good job, or a house. That is characteristic of old covenant people. If you find that your thinking is like that, it would indicate that you are an old covenant Christian. If you imagine that earthly blessing is the primary mark of God's blessing, just think of the millions of people who are atheists who have got much more blessing than you "and you will see the folly of that way of thinking. The mark of new covenant blessing is that we become more and more like Christ.

The apostles were earthly-minded before the day of Pentecost. So when they were told by the Lord that they would soon be baptized in the Holy Spirit, they immediately thought that they would be getting an earthly kingdom. And so they asked, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). The Lord replied, "No. That's not what I meant. It's not for you to know times or the seasons on such matters. The Lord has put all that in His own power" (verse 7). There are many who study the book of Revelation, seeking to discover the times for various end-time events. It's not for us to know exactly when Jesus will come and set up His kingdom. But what we do need to know is the power of the Holy Spirit.

What is the identifying mark of being baptised in the Holy Spirit? Jesus made it crystal clear in Acts 1:8 that it was power. He never said a word about tongues being the evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Neither did the apostles say a word about this. Yet many Christians today proclaim "speaking in tongues (an unlearned language)" as the "initial evidence", even though there is not a single verse in the Bible that teaches it.

In Acts 19:2, Paul asks a question of some disciples in Ephesus: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Paul's question here clearly teaches us that:

1. It is possible to receive the Holy Spirit at the same time as one believes in Christ,
2. It is possible to believe in Jesus and yet not receive the Holy Spirit. That means one is not really born-again.
3. We can know with certainty whether we have received the Holy Spirit or not.

They replied saying that they had not even heard about the Holy Spirit. Then he asked them, "Into what then were you baptized?" This shows that Christians in those days were baptised not in the name of Jesus alone but "in the name of the Father, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit". That was why Paul expected them to have heard about the Holy Spirit when they were baptised. They then told him that they had been baptised into John's baptism. Then Paul baptised them in the name of the Father, the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Then Paul laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke in unknown languages and prophesied.

Notice the different operations of the Holy Spirit in Acts. In Chapter 2, the 120 were praying and the Holy Spirit fell on them. In Chapter 8, the Samaritans received the Spirit when Peter and John laid hands on them. In Chapter 9, Paul received the Spirit when Ananias laid hands on him. In Chapter 10, Cornelius received the Spirit even before he was baptised in water, while listening to a message, without anyone laying hands on him. Here in Chapter 19, they received the Spirit through the laying on of hands. This teaches us that the Holy Spirit can be received with or without the laying on of hands, and before or after water baptism. The method is not the main thing but the reality.