

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 16

Volume 16 • Number 3 • July 1992

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS

Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



The editorial committee of the consultation were Dr. Miriam Adeney (Seattle), Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi), Dr. Peter Beyerhaus (convenor, Tübingen), Dr. M. A. Jeeves (St. Andrews); Dr. James I. Packer (Vancouver). p. 271

The Promise of the Spirit for the Great Commission

Robert S. Coleman

Printed with permission.

THE INDISPENSABLE GIFT

The affirmation of Christ's all-encompassing authority erases any doubt about the triumph of His kingdom ([Matt. 28:18](#)): and the consequent command to disciple all nations settles the plan of action ([Matt. 28:19-20a](#)) but how can His faltering disciples succeed in their mission once the Lord has returned to heaven? The answer comes in the concluding promise: 'Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age' ([Matt. 28:20](#)).

Jesus knows that left to our own resources and ingenuity we are helpless. Only he who has all power is sufficient for the task. That is why he assures the disciples of His continuing presence, a truth earlier enunciated in His teaching on the Spirit ([John 14:14-20](#), [26](#); [15:26](#); [16:7](#), [12-16](#)).

Luke's rendering of the Great Commission brings out this promise even more explicitly. 'I am going to send you what my Father has promised,' Jesus says ([Luke 24:49](#)). 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit' ([Acts 1:4, 5](#)): 'Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high' ([Luke 24:49](#)): 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses' ([Acts 1:8](#)).¹

John underscores the same promise in his account of Christ sending his disciples into the world on a mission like his own ([John 20:21](#)). Then, in anticipation of the Pentecostal outpouring, 'he breathed on them, and said "Receive the Holy Spirit"' ([John 20:21, 22](#)).² p. 272

¹ Perhaps it is well to note that the Acts of the Apostles constitutes the second volume of the Gospel of Luke. The first volume described 'all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven,' whereas Acts chronicles what he continues to do in his Church ([Acts 1:1](#); cf. [Luke 1:1-4](#)). Luke's record here of the witnessing commission with its emphasis on the Spirit's power constituted the last utterance of Jesus before returning to the Father.

² In this passage, Jesus also speaks of the disciples forgiving sin in others, an authority which he exercised, but which in the hands of the disciples can only be understood in conjunction with the Spirit's direction.

Strangely, though, this indispensable provision may be overlooked. I am reminded of a British pastor who was quizzing his class on the Apostles Creed. Each student was to repeat one phrase of the creed. The first began, 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.'

The second student said, 'I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.'

The recitation proceeded smoothly until it fell silent in one spot. The minister looked up from his notes to see what caused the silence. One of the students said, 'I'm sorry, sir, but the student who believed in the Holy Spirit is absent today.'

Many people, alas, are 'absent' when it comes to appropriating the promised gift of the Spirit. Whether through ignorance, misunderstanding, lack of faith, or something else, they never seem to 'wait' until 'endued with power from on high.'

CREATIVE POWER

God acts as the Father in administration; he is seen as the Son in revelation, but he moves as the Spirit in operation.³ Though the three Persons of the Godhead are equal in glory and superiority, when the function of power becomes prominent, the activity of the third member of the Holy Trinity comes to the fore.⁴

We are introduced to him in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis when it says that 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters' ([Gen. 1:2](#)). He was the divine energy bringing into existence and ordering the cosmos as God commanded (cf. [Job 26:13](#)). By the same mighty power, God still upholds that which he has made ([Psa. 104:30](#); [Isa. 40:12](#)), and apart from the Spirit's constant renewing, the universe and all its life systems would revert to nothingness.

The creative function of the Holy Spirit received particular attention [p. 273](#) when God made man in his own 'likeness' ([Gen. 1:26](#)).⁵ We are told that he 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life' ([Gen. 2:7](#)). The word here for 'breath' is the root for the word 'spirit'. Literally it means that God spiritualised the creature he formed from 'the dust of the ground', and thereby 'man became a living being' ([Gen. 2:7](#)). Thus Job testified, 'the Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life' ([Job 33:4](#)). Only through the interposition of the Spirit do we live and move and have our being in God.

RECREATED IN CHRIST

³ This analogy over-simplifies the provinces of action within the Trinity, of course. Any formulation of the triune nature of God proves inadequate, for the very reason that human intelligence cannot fathom the divine mind. How three uncreated Persons can function in one essence is a mystery. Yet only by the Trinity can the Personality of God be understood. For a discussion of this mystery, see R. C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1990), pp. 33–74.

⁴ There is no want of good material on this subject. Among the more popular introductions are the books of Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit* (Waco: Word, 1978); and James Elder Cumming, *A Handbook on the Holy Spirit* (Minneapolis: Dimension Books, 1977, 1965). A general summary of the Spirit's ministry, along with some bibliographic references, will be found in my book, *The Mind of the Master* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1983), pp. 21–30, 199–120.

⁵ A veiled reference to the Trinity may be seen in the deliberative council within the Godhead respecting the decision: 'Let us make man in our image' ([Gen. 1:26](#)). 'Us' indicates more than one (also in [Gen. 3:22](#); [11:6, 7](#)). Further strengthening this reference to the Trinity is the plural word for God, 'Elohim,' in [Genesis 1:1](#). There is the passage, too, in [Isaiah 58:16](#) which speaks of a grouping of the persons of the Trinity. Though the concept of a plurality of persons within the being of one God emerges early in the Old Testament, the emphasis is more upon the unity of his nature, perhaps in consideration of the limited understanding of the people and the temptation to idolatry.

Tragically, however, God's purpose in making a people for his glory—to live in communion with him—was lost because of sin. Though his Spirit still sought to bring a fallen race to God ([Gen. 6:3](#); cf. [Psa. 139:7](#)), the inner presence of the Spirit was withdrawn, leaving our forbears not only depraved, but deprived of the means of divine fellowship. We all turned to our own way, vainly existing 'without hope and without God in the world' ([Eph. 2:12](#); cf. [Gen. 3:8-24](#); [Psa. 58:3](#); [Rom. 3:23](#)).

That is why, even to begin to live as God designed, we must be 'born again'—'born of the Spirit' ([John 3:3](#), [7](#), [8](#)). 'I tell you the truth', Jesus said, 'unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit' ([John 3:5](#), [6](#); cf. [6:63](#); [Rom. 8:11](#); [II Cor. 3:6](#); [I Peter 3:18](#)). This does not mean that God destroys our humanity. Rather he takes our corrupted nature, and through the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit, redirects our life according to his created purpose ([John 1:12](#); [II Cor. 5:17](#); [Titus 3:5](#); cf. [Ezekiel 36:26](#)).

Having transformed by his power, the Spirit continues to nourish and strengthen the growing child of God. His renewing work in us is likened to a spring of 'living water ... welling up to eternal life' ([John 7:38](#); [4:14](#)). He witnesses with our spirit that we belong to God ([Rom. 8:14](#); [Gal. 4:6](#); [I John 3:24](#); [4:13](#)). He helps us pray, interpreting the groaning of our heart to the Father ([Rom. 8:26](#), [27](#); cf. [Eph. p. 274 6:18](#)). He enables us to worship ([John 4:24](#)). He guides into truth, ever teaching us more of our Lord ([John 14:26](#); [16:13](#); [I John 2:7](#); cf. [Neh. 9:20](#); [Psa. 143:10](#)).

As we obey his leading, confessing our sin when convicted, we are made clean 'by the truth: and walk in fellowship with God' ([John 17:17](#); cf. [15:3](#); [Eph. 5:26](#); [I John 1:7](#), [9](#)). The fruits of the Spirit, character traits so beautifully portrayed in Christ—'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control'—begin to flow from our lives ([Gal. 5:22](#), [23](#); cf. [Phil. 1:11](#); [Col. 1:10](#); [Eph. 5:9](#); [John 15:5](#)). With our 'minds set on what the Spirit desires', we are progressively changed into the character of Jesus 'with ever-increasing glory' ([Rom. 8:5](#); [II Cor. 3:18](#)). Finally, on the resurrection morning, our very mortal bodies will be changed into the likeness of our Lord's glorified form ([Rom. 8:11](#); [I Cor. 15:44](#), [49](#); [Phil. 3:21](#)). From beginning to end, partaking of the saving life of Christ is the Spirit's work.

PREPARING REDEMPTION

As we would expect, too, it was the same Person of the Trinity who prepared the way for the Saviour's coming into the world. In the Old Testament few people knew his power, but from time to time he would come upon selected persons and equip them to perform a service in God's unfolding plan of salvation.

We are told, for example, that the Spirit of God was with Joseph in Egypt ([Gen. 41:38](#)). He qualified Moses to lead the children of Israel, just as he prepared the seventy elders who assisted him ([Num. 11:17](#), [25](#), [26](#), [29](#)). When it came time to build the tabernacle, a pattern of redemption to be consummated in Christ, the Spirit filled Bezalel and Oholiab with skill and knowledge for the task ([Ex. 31:3](#); [35:31](#)). In the same way, the Spirit qualified those appointed to make the robes for Aaron and his priestly sons ([Ex. 28:3](#), [4](#)).⁶

⁶ No priest in the Old Testament could come before the altar without this proper clothing. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for coat has the root meaning 'to cover' or 'to hide.' It is the same word used in [Genesis 3:21](#) when it says that God made coats of skin to cover Adam and Eve. The robe worn by the priests was in this sense a way of showing that they ministered, not in their own righteousness, but in the covering of the blameless Lamb of God and High Priest of Heaven. For amplification of this meaning, see my book, *Written In Blood* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1972), p. 40-42. A beautiful study of the garments worn by the priests as related to Christ is by C. W. Slemming, *These Are the Garments* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott).

All through the history of Israel the divine Spirit can be seen at work p. 275 making a nation to accomplish his purpose ([Haggai 2:5](#); cf. [Isa. 30:10](#)). He raised up judges for his people ([Num. 27:18](#), [Deut. 34:19](#); [Judges 3:10](#), [34](#); [11:29](#); [13:25](#); [14:6](#), [19](#); [15:14](#)) and later the kings ([I Sam. 10:6](#); [11:6](#); [16:13](#); [II Sam. 23:1](#), [2](#)). Tragically, however, these leaders too often betrayed their trust and the Spirit departed from them.⁷ But insofar as they fulfilled God's mission in the world, it was the third Person of the Holy Trinity that qualified them for the task.

At times the Spirit came upon prophets and inspired them to communicate a message of the Lord ([I Sam. 19:20](#), [23](#); [II Sam. 23:1](#), [2](#); [Eze. 11:5](#); [Neh. 9:20](#), [30](#); [Micah 3:8](#); [Zech. 7:12](#)). Our whole confidence in what they said, and later wrote in the Scriptures rests upon the fact that they were borne along by the Spirit of God ([II Peter 1:21](#); cf. [Matt. 22:43](#); [Mark 12:36](#); [Acts 1:16](#); [28:25](#); [II Tim. 3:16](#)).

Under his inspiration a day was envisioned when God's plan of redemption would consummate in the coming of Messiah. A virgin would conceive, and she would bear a son, who would be called Immanuel—'God with us' ([Isa. 7:14](#); [Matt. 1:23](#)). Upon this Branch growing out of the root of David, the Spirit of the Lord would rest without measure ([Isa. 11:1](#), [2](#)), and through him a new age would dawn when the Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh ([Isa. 32:15](#); cf. [Joel 2:28–32](#); [Haggai 2:4–7](#); [Zech. 12:10](#); [14:8](#)).

MINISTRY OF THE SON

Just as foretold, in the fullness of time he who had been working from the beginning to effect God's purpose now planted the seed of the Father in the womb of the virgin so that she conceived and brought forth into human experience the only begotten Son of God ([Matt. 1:18](#), [20](#); [Luke 1:35](#)).⁸ Thereafter the Spirit directs his incarnate life, not p. 276 in a limited degree or for a special time, as his predecessors in Israel, but in full measure and permanent possession.⁹

The fullness of the Spirit receives particular attention as Jesus begins his public ministry ([Luke 4:1](#), [14](#), [15](#); [Mark 1:12](#)). John the Baptist's announcement that he will baptise with 'the Holy Spirit and with fire' further discloses the spiritual nature of his mission ([Matt. 3:11](#); [Mark 1:8](#); [Luke 3:16](#)). Later, explaining why Christ is pre-eminent in all that he does, John added: 'For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God; to him God gives the Spirit without limit' ([John 3:34](#); cf. [Luke 10:21](#)). To dramatise his unique relationship with the Godhead, at the river Jordan the Spirit was seen descending upon the Master like a dove, and a voice spoke from heaven confirming the Father's pleasure in the Son ([Matt. 3:13–17](#); [Mark 1:9–11](#); [Luke 3:21–23](#); cf. [John 1:32–34](#)).

Lest this divine endorsement for his mission be missed, upon his first invitation to speak at his home synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus stood up and read from the scroll of

⁷ Saul is a notable example ([I Sam. 16:14](#)). Samson is another ([Judges 15:14](#); cf. [16:20](#)). Because of their sin, God no longer could use them. They tried to do the same old thing, but the Spirit was not in it. The danger of this happening can be seen in the prayer of David after he had committed sin with Bathsheba. Knowing the consequences of his act, he earnestly besought the Lord that the Spirit would not be taken from him ([Psa. 51:11](#)). Nothing is more futile than trying to carry on God's work in the energy of the flesh.

⁸ In other respects the physical birth of Christ was not unlike our own. What the Scripture makes clear is that his conception was different. That is where life begins. Advocates of abortion should take note.

⁹ As a perfect man, of course, Jesus had a spirit of his own, like anyone else ([Mark 2:8](#); [John 11:33](#); [13:21](#); [23:46](#); [Matt. 27:50](#); cf. [Eccl. 12:7](#)). How his spiritual nature was fused with the Holy Spirit lies within the mystery of his human and divine personality. We know that he felt the same natural sensibilities as we do, but his human spirit yielded fully to the Spirit of God.

Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me; Therefore he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' ([Luke 4:18, 19](#); cf. [Isa. 61:1-2](#)). Having read the lesson, he rolled up the parchment, gave it back to the attendant, then sat down and announced to the startled congregation, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' ([Luke 4:21](#)).

The Spirit's power through the works of Christ displayed his authority over the demonic structure of this world, and thereby evidenced the coming of the kingdom of God ([Matt. 12:27, 28](#)). Those who rejected the claims of Christ, of course, were unwilling to accept this conclusion. To do so would require a recognition of his Messianic mission. So they took the other option, and accused him of being in league with the devil. Whereupon Jesus warned the unbelieving Jews that they were in danger of committing an unpardonable sin—they [p. 277](#) were blaspheming the Holy Spirit ([Matt. 12:31, 32](#); [Mark 3:28, 29](#); cf. [Luke 11:14-26](#)).¹⁰

Clearly the Spirit was ever present in Christ to make his life a revelation of God. Whatever he said and did was a demonstration of this mission. Finally, by 'the eternal Spirit,' he 'offered himself unblemished to God' as our atoning sacrifice ([Heb. 9:14](#)); then through the same instrumentality, he was raised from the dead ([Rom. 8:11](#); cf. [1:4](#)).

CONTINUING CHRIST'S WORK

As the Spirit fulfilled God's saving Word in Christ, so also he would enable his disciples to make known the good news of his completed work, to the ends of the earth ([Acts 1:8](#)). Through his power, they would be equipped to do the very works of their Lord, and even 'greater things than these' ([John 14:12](#)). Jesus does not elaborate on these 'greater' deeds, but his promise would seem to relate to the multiplication of disciples according to the Great Commission mandate.¹¹

They are under no illusion that the work will be easy. Indeed, the disciples can expect the same hatred from the world as was directed against their Lord ([John 14:18-27](#)). But when under duress, Jesus told them not to worry, for the Spirit would give them utterance to speak ([Matt. 10:16-23](#); [Mark 13:11](#); [Luke 12:12](#)). He would lift up the Son, and as men and women see his glory, they will be convicted of their [p. 278](#) 'guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment' ([John 16:8-11](#)).¹²

¹⁰ Jesus does not say here that the Pharisees were beyond redemption, but that by their hostile attitude they reflected a condition which, unless reversed, would bring final separation from God's mercy. To scorn Christ is to reject the only way of salvation, and hence to be in a state of unforgiveness. If one persists in this rejection, the state of judgment becomes permanent—one is guilty of an eternal sin.

¹¹ A greater work can be seen in the ensuing ministry of those first believers in the Acts of the Apostles. Not only is there greater geographic expansion of the Church, but also the numerical increase of believers is no less remarkable. When Christ returned to heaven, we are told there were scarcely more than 500 believers and these were primarily located within the confines of Israel ([1 Cor. 15:6](#)). But when the Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost, that one day about 3,000 were converted, and among them were pilgrims from at least 15 other language groups ([Acts 2:9-11](#)). Everyday thereafter others were added to the Church as they were saved ([Acts 2:41, 47](#)), and Christians began to witness across the earth. Indeed, the Book of Acts really has no conclusion, for we are still living in this promise of 'greater things', and it will not end until the Great Commission is fulfilled.

¹² Under conviction of the Spirit, persons are brought to see their unbelief in Christ, which is the epitome of sin. In so doing, they are made to recognise in Christ's completed work at Calvary the only way one can appear righteous before a holy God. Moreover, the world's standard of truth is seen to be utterly in error.

What a load this takes off our shoulders. It is not our responsibility to convince anyone of the truth. That is the Spirit's work. All we can do is witness to the Gospel and leave the matter of persuasion to God. The Spirit will apply the message, and draw broken and contrite hearts to the Savior.¹³

ANOTHER COUNSELLOR

As his days on earth drew to a close, Jesus was particularly concerned that his disciples understand how he would carry on his ministry through them by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ The teaching comes out most beautifully on the eve of his crucifixion while they were together in the upper room after the Pascal supper ([John 14:1–16:33](#)). Knowing that soon he must go, Jesus told the disciples not to fear, for he would not leave them orphans. When he returned to heaven, he would ask the Father to give them 'Another Counsellor' to take his place, even 'the Spirit of truth' ([John 14:16, 17](#)).

No theory; no makeshift substitute. The reference is to a real Person, like himself; 'Another' to stand by their sides—one who would be with them in spiritual reality just as their Master had been with them in his physical presence.¹⁵ Heretofore Jesus had been their counsellor and [p. 279](#) teacher, but now the Spirit would guide them into all truth ([John 14:26; 16:14](#)); he would answer their questions ([John 16:13, 23](#)); he would show them the future ([John 16:13](#)); he would help them pray ([John 14:12, 13; 16:23, 24](#)). In short, he would glorify Christ in the lives of his disciples ([John 15:26; 16: 14–16](#)).

Actually their relationship to Jesus through the Spirit was to be more fulfilling than anything experienced before. In the flesh Jesus was limited to one body and one place; he could not be with his disciples all the time. With those physical barriers removed, however, through the Spirit, the disciples could live continually in the presence of their Lord. That is why he could say, 'I will be with you always, to the very end of the age' ([Matt. 28:20](#); cf. [John 14:16](#)).

This is the promise in which the Great Commission lives and has its being—the means by which disciples go forth to disciple the nations. Jesus is with us, not as a distant observer, but as a present associate. Note, too, that it is not a promise obtained when we get to heaven, but a fellowship to be experienced now as we obey his command.

Until Jesus had finished his work on earth, and was exalted at the right hand of God, the promise could not be realised ([John 7:39, Acts 2:33](#)). Only after he returned to take his place of supremacy at the heavenly throne could the Spirit be released in power upon the

Jesus, rejected by the world, is exalted in heaven; whereas the prince of this world, Satan, now stands condemned.

¹³ Much superficiality in present day efforts of evangelism could be avoided if this truth were observed. All too easily we try to induce human response to the Gospel through behavioural and psychological manipulation. Not only do such practices produce stillborn converts, but they cheapen the witness of the Church in the world.

¹⁴ For a good treatment of Jesus' teaching on the Spirit, see Louis Burton Crane, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Holy Spirit* (New York: America Tract Society, 1905); J. Ritchie Smith, *The Holy Spirit in the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1926); and Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976).

¹⁵ The word 'another' here is not the term used to compare two objects different in quality, but rather this is a term used to compare two different persons or objects that have the same essential quality. While the word recognizes the difference between the second and third Members of the Trinity, in quality of life—in holiness, in love, in truth, in power—the incarnate Word and the invisible Spirit are the same. G. Campbell Morgan discusses this distinction in *The Teaching of Christ* (New York: Revell, 1913), p. 65.

expectant Church; not for a few years, but for an age; not on a few choice individuals, but on all who would receive him.

THE PENTECOSTAL OUTPOURING

It is easy to see why Jesus told his disciples to wait until this power was experienced ([Luke 24:49](#); [Acts 1:5, 8](#)). How else could they ever do his work? Their enthroned Lord needed to become a living reality in their ministry. 'The very Spirit of God's own Son, as he had lived and loved, had obeyed and died', had 'to become their personal lie'.¹⁶ Unless they were enthralled by his Presence, his mission would never captivate their souls.

The awaited empowerment begins to unfold at Pentecost.¹⁷ As the disciples were assembled at Jerusalem in prayer, suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the house where they were sitting ([Acts 2:2](#)). The wind, symbolising the strength of the Spirit, came first to the believing fellowship, from whence it p. 280 would sweep across the earth with life-giving power. Then 'they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them' ([Acts 2:3](#)). The distribution of the sacred fire pointed to the truth that the Spirit had come to dwell with all the members of the Church. Descriptive, too, of their witness-bearing function, they 'began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them' ([Acts 2:4](#)).

The enduring miracle on this day, however, was not in the signs dramatising the event,¹⁸ but rather in the way the disciples were 'filled with the Holy spirit' ([Acts 2:4](#)), an experience repeatedly underscored in the ensuing account of the apostolic church.¹⁹ Jesus as an external Presence now reigned as Sovereign in their hearts. The Gospel became life and power within them.

The full significance of this heavenly endowment becomes increasingly apparent as we move through the Book of Acts. What joyous assurance emboldens the disciples in their witness! A purity of intention drives them. Their hearts overflow in praise to God. When beaten and stoned, they pray for their tormentors. Something about them was different. 'Look how they love each other,' one observer noted.²⁰ There was a sparkle in their eyes, a deep serenity in their souls. By watching them closely, even their antagonists could tell that they 'had been with Jesus' ([Acts 4:13](#)).

¹⁶ Andrew Murray, *The Spirit of Christ* (London: Nesbet and Co., 1880), p. 149.

¹⁷ Among the many studies on this subject, probably the most complete is Henry Boer's work, *Pentecost and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Win. B. Eerdmans, 1961).

¹⁸ The wind and the fire do not reappear in subsequent visitations of the Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles, and tongues are only noted twice ([Acts 10:46](#); [19:6](#)). Tongues are mentioned by Paul when speaking of spiritual gifts in his letter to the Corinthian church, but nowhere does he indicate that the gift is any evidence of divine favour. In fact, most of the teaching in regard to tongues cautions against any undue attention to them ([1 Cor. 12:1-31](#); [13:1](#); [14:1-40](#); cf. [Rom. 12:6-8](#); [Eph. 4:8](#)).

¹⁹ Noted in [Acts 4:8](#); [31](#); [6:3](#); [5](#); [7:55](#); [9:17](#); [11:24](#); [13:9](#); [52](#); cf. [Luke 1:15](#); [41](#); [67](#); [4:1](#). The figure conveys the idea of a personality being pervaded by the Spirit's power and influence. In some instances the text underscores an act of being filled; in other usages the emphasis is upon acting in the fullness of the Spirit. That the Spirit-filled life was understood as the norm of Christian experience is seen in [Ephesians 5:18](#), where Paul exhorts the saints to be constantly filled with the Spirit. The tenses here underscore a moment by moment abiding in Christ. Other descriptions of the Spirit's personal bestowal are mentioned in the Acts about 25 times, like receive, give, fall, pour out, baptise, anoint, come, and these terms sometimes relate to an infilling. Each instance needs to be interpreted in its own context.

²⁰ Atenagoras, 'A Plea Regarding Christians', in Eberhard Arnold, ed., *The Early Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 118.

Needless to say, not every Christian lived in the fullness of the Spirit. Accounts of the early church reflect ample problems of strife and pettiness among believers. But where these conditions existed, the New Testament made abundantly clear that carnal saints were living below the expectations of their Lord. p. 281

RECEIVING THE PROMISE

Pentecost marked the beginning of an era that would continue until Spirit-endued witnesses bear the Gospel to the ends of the earth. To be sure, as an historical event the outpouring on that day can never be repeated—it is an accomplished fact; but the spiritual endowment it gave to the church continues for all generations. Nothing about the power from on high is restricted to the apostolic church. As Peter proclaimed, ‘The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God shall call’ ([Acts 2:35](#)).

And why should any believer not have the blessing? ‘Everyone who asks, receives,’ Jesus said ([Luke 11–10](#)). Then, to underscore this truth, he reminded his disciples that if an earthly father, being evil, knows how to give good gifts to his children, ‘how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask’ ([Luke 11:13](#)).

Obviously, though, receiving the Spirit in fullness requires that our hearts be empty of that which hinders his possession. Where there is known sin, it must be confessed, and our character conformed to all that we know of Christ. He must be Lord of our lives. Not that we can have all of him, of course. No human can ever contain the infinite personality of God. But he can surely contain all of us.

As we learn more of him through obedience, so also our capacity to experience his life will enlarge. There is never a foreclosure on growth in grace and knowledge. His presence is fresh every morning. Special anointings of the Spirit will be needed as new demands of ministry require greater sensitivity and strength. Yet however difficult the task, we can rest on the promise that Jesus is with us, never to leave, never to forsake his own.

How we describe this abiding may differ, depending upon theological presuppositions.²¹ What matters is not the definition, but the reality of the ever present Saviour and Lord in our lives. p. 282

AN EXAMPLE

Many people engaged in the work of Christ may not embrace easily this promise. Dwight L. Moody was such a person. Though very energetic, for years he laboured largely in the energy of the flesh.

Sensing the problem, two ladies, burdened for his ministry, mentioned that they were praying for him. Mr. Moody wanted to know why they were praying for him rather than the unsaved. ‘Oh,’ they said, ‘We are praying that you will get the power.’²² The evangelist did not understand what they meant, and at first was rather irritated by their concern.

²¹ Some persons, for example, may equate the Pentecostal infilling with true conversion. Others look upon it as a spiritual event after regeneration. That the experience is variously identified in Scripture adds to the difficulty. Perhaps it may be agreed that everyone receives the Spirit when saved, though the fullness of the Spirit may not be realised until later, nor the conditions maintained. However interpreted, what matters is that the Spirit have undisputed reign in the heart. To see how people may know the same reality in different ways, read V. Raymond Edman, *They Found the Secret* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

²² Taken from the account of R. A. Torrey, a close associate of Moody, and in many ways his successor, in *Why God Used D. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1923), p. 56.

But as time went on, he asked them to tell him more about the Spirit, and he joined them in prayer.

Not long after this, one day while he was walking down Wall Street in New York City, their prayers were answered. The Spirit came upon him with such force that he had to ask God to stay his hand because he could hold no more. From that time on his life and work reflected a new spiritual depth and power.

As with others who have known such a definite renewing of the heart, the power of the Spirit became a growing emphasis in Moody's ministry, particularly when addressing potential church leaders. Being a very practical minded man, he could not understand why some people would obscure this essential truth by academic disputation on peripheral matters. 'Oh, why will they split hairs?' he said one day to Dr. R. A. Torrey after a frustrating discussion with some teachers. 'Why don't they see that this is just the one thing that they themselves need?'²³

Dr. Torrey recalls an occasion in the summer of 1894 which illustrates Mr. Moody's feeling. It was the closing day of the Northfield Conference, where students had gathered from a number of eastern colleges. Torrey, at Moody's request, had preached that morning on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When he finished at noon, he told the students that Moody had invited them 'to go up on the mountain at three o'clock to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit'. But, he said, 'Some of you cannot wait those hours. You do not need to wait. Go to your rooms; go out into the woods; go anywhere you can get alone with God and have the matter out.'²⁴

At three o'clock the more than 400 students assembled and went up p. 283 the mountain. After a while, Mr. Moody said: 'I don't think we need to go any further; let us sit down here.'²⁵ So they sat down on the ground and on logs under the trees.

'Have any of you anything to say?' he asked. Many of the students arose, one after another to say that they could not wait, and since the morning service they had been alone with God, and could affirm that they had received the promised enduement of the Spirit.

When their testimonies were finished, Mr. Moody said: 'Young men, I can't see any reason why we shouldn't kneel down here right now and ask God that the Holy Ghost may fall on us just as definitely as he fell upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. Let us pray.'²⁶

As they had gone up the mountain that day heavy clouds had been gathering. Dr. Torrey says, 'Just as we began to pray those clouds broke and the raindrops began to fall through the overhanging pines. But there was another cloud that had been gathering over Northfield, a cloud big with the mercy and grace and power of God; and as we began to pray our prayers seemed to pierce that cloud and the Holy Ghost fell upon US.'²⁷

That is what all of us need—a heavenly anointing of the Spirit of Christ. Thanks be to God, if his presence is not already a reality in our lives, we do not have to wait. The Comforter has come; he is here now. And all who surrender to him as Lord will abide in the promise of the Great Commission.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 63.

God's Agenda for the City: Some Biblical Perspectives

John W. Olley

Reprinted with permission from Urban Mission, September 1990.

From the Garden of Eden to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem: such is the direction of biblical account of the journey of God and humanity. Along the way there are many other cities: Enoch, the city built by Cain; Babel (or the more familiar English name, Babylon); Jericho; Jerusalem, the city of David; Samaria; Nineveh; Antioch; Rome. Each biblical city brings with it different features that help us to reflect on our life and mission in cities today.

A PLACE OF PROTECTION

From the city built by Cain to the city-states of the Canaanites there are many places in the Old Testament called a 'city'. The most general sense of the word is 'a fixed settlement which is rendered inaccessible to assailants by a wall and/or other defence works' (Frick 1977, 30). Further, 'to build a city' is to 'fortify' (e.g., [1 Kings 16:24](#)). Jerusalem is where it is because its topography and water supply meant easier defence.

And here is ambiguity. Nehemiah can seek God's aid to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and when they are completed 'all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realised that this work had been done with the help of our God' ([Neh. 6:16](#)). And yet the massive walls of Canaanite cities are no security against the Israelites, and the Jewish king Hezekiah is criticised because, in the face of Assyrian threat, 'you counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall ... but you did not look to the Maker of it all' ([Is. 22:11](#)). The new city of Jerusalem has its walls too, but its gates are never shut. Furthermore, unlike the ancient cities which hid their water supply from outsiders, the new city has a river that flows out to the nations. The biblical references to walls reflect the persistent warning not to rely on horses but to be faithful to God and to do what is right and just. [p. 285](#)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT

The story of the Tower of Babel is often spoken of as a human attempt to reach God. I find it significant that the biblical statement by the builders is, 'Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth' ([Gen. 11:4](#)). It was common in the ancient Near East to speak of the fame of a city due to its great buildings, and the later Wisdom of Ben Sirach recognises that 'children and the building of a city establish a man's