

What is Going on in Acts 8:16?

“For [the Holy Spirit] had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”

Was there something defective in Philip’s ministry?

He proclaimed the Good News, that is, Jesus the Christ and the kingdom of God (8:4-5, 12). He performed acts of healing and cast out unclean spirits (8:7). His words and deeds brought joy to the people of Samaria (8:8) and they believed Philip and were baptized (8:12).

The apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John when they heard that Samaria had received the Word of God (8:14). Upon their arrival Peter and John prayed that the Samaritans would receive the Holy Spirit because although the Samaritans had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit had not fallen upon them (8:15-16). The apostles laid hands on the people and they received the Holy Spirit.

The apostles do not discredit or rebuke Philip for having done anything wrong. The people of Samaria (Simon Magus excepted) are not rebuked for a lack of repentance. Philip will go on after this to do the very same kind of thing (8:35-38) he was doing in Samaria and the result is different(?).

Only Apostles can convert? Philip didn’t say or do the right things? Laying on of hands? Did the Samaritans not really believe?

We know that it’s not just the apostles who can convert others. The Word of the Lord continued to grow throughout the whole book of Acts, and this was not just by the apostles. The apostles have a very important role because they were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, but we know that there were also others (Acts 1:21-22). But let’s not lose the focus. This is the account of what *Jesus* is continuing to do and teach among the people. If there is any conversion it is happening through people, but it is the work of God.

Can we have the Holy Spirit, yet not have all the Holy Spirit?

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

John 7:39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Acts 10:43 To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

1 Corinthians 12:3, 12–13 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. . . . For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Ephesians 4:4–5 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

Faith, Baptism and the Holy Spirit all go together. But we do know that different people receive different gifts from the Holy Spirit. The fact that one has received one gift, but another has not or

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that one has received a lesser measure of some gift than another person has does not mean that one person is saved, but another is not. There is a variety of gifts given, but one Spirit and one Body of Christ. In this way, it is possible that one person has received a gift from the Holy Spirit, but another person has not. But again, this is not a difference in the status of their salvation.

Is salvation one-stage process or a two-step process? E.g. Baptism and then laying on of hands OR repentance and regeneration followed by baptism in or of the Spirit?

This does not seem to be the case. We connect salvation with faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is connected with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit creates faith through the Word of God spoken to us. But Baptism too is the Word of God spoken to us. What makes Baptism unique is that it is connected to the tangible act of pouring water on someone in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit because of the command of Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20). For us, salvation is then a one step process governed by the Spirit of God through the means of grace (Word and Sacraments). Can God save outside of this? Yes, but because this is where God has revealed His saving action and commanded us to look, we should find confidence in no other thing.

Is what happened in Samaria normative or was it unusual? Why?

This is probably the most important question to ask. Before we take too much from this one episode in the Book of Acts, let's remember that Luke is writing an orderly account of the growth of the early church. He is not pretending to be Jesus and telling all believers in all places what must be done. So Pentecost is described as a miraculous event, but it is not presumed that unless the Word of God is spoken to you by a Holy Spirit-made, multi-lingual apostle, you cannot be saved. Instead, Luke describes a wondrous event in which God sent His Spirit to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah.

In this story of the Gospel coming to the Samaritans, it has every mark of being unusual. It is unusual because up until this point, those being saved were all Jews. The Gospel is now coming to the Samaritans and they were by no means considered as having equal standing with Jews. It is unusual because the apostles come to check up (?) on the Samaritans. The apostles don't check up on the Ethiopian eunuch. We don't necessarily hear about them checking on all the thousands of believers up until this point and they're not going to be going around doing this later. And what would happen after the apostles died out? The church continued to grow even after the death of the first apostles.

After this, the next time the apostles come to inspect what is going on, it is the story of Cornelius' conversion (11:1-18) and then later when the Greeks in Antioch turned to the Lord (11:20-24). In both of these places, what seems to be happening is that the church is stretching out and growing beyond its previous borders. First, only Jews believed in Jesus, then Samaritans, then Gentiles, both near and far. All of this follows Jesus' own agenda that he set for the apostles (1:8). The connection here then doesn't seem to be that the apostles were necessary for the Gospel to make those jumps, but that God brought the apostles to each of those places because (1) He had promised that this would happen and (2) the apostles' presence served to validate and unify what could very quickly become a series of disconnect believers in Jesus. Before this Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles had nothing in common and lived accordingly. From this point on, however, they would be part of one family and the presence of the apostles assured this was recognized by everyone.