

ROME
& THE BIRTH OF
CHRISTIANITY



Part 12: Introduction

There is no natural explanation for the rapid spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the entirety of the Roman Empire. As we have said before, Yale historian Kenneth Scott Latourette's research revealed that "our records, unsatisfactory though they are, suffice to show that by A.D. 180 Christians were in all the provinces of the Empire and in Mesopotamia." To what, then, might we attribute this rapid spread of the gospel? Wouldn't the most likely expectation be that this small band of 120 of His followers would be quickly dispersed or annihilated by the power of Rome? We should remember that the Pharisee Gamaliel reminded the Sanhedrin that Theudas rose up with 400 men, but "he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came



Part 12: Introduction

to nothing” (Acts 5:36). He also reminded them that Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away some people after him; he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered” (Acts 5:37). His contemporary illustrations were given as a caution to the Council. “If,” he argued, “this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them, or else you may even be found fighting against God” (Acts 5:38-39). So his argument is that if the executed Jesus was a mere man, his movement would come to nothing. Dr. Simon Kistemaker maintains that Gamaliel’s “examples from their own history are proof that manmade movements are fruitless and cause more harm than good.”

Part 12: Introduction

We must also be reminded that the Apostles were seen as “uneducated and untrained men” (Acts 4:13), devoid of any personal power, talents, education, or special intelligence. So we must look elsewhere for an explanation of the rapid and successful spread of the gospel to the eastern and western boundaries of the Roman Empire.

The author of the *Gospel of Luke* and the book of *Acts* reports that a supernatural phenomenon occurred 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. On the Day of Pentecost, “suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting....And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 2:2,4). This event alone answers our question.

To Whom Do We Turn for an Answer?



Let's turn back the hands of time to hear the voices of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Old Testament prophets as they reveal the coming of the Holy Spirit "to mediate the presence and ministry of the Lord Jesus" to believers and to empower them to fulfill the Great Commission.

The Promise

“As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance; but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Mt. 3:11).

- John the Baptist





John the Baptist Preaching

1634-1635

Rembrandt van Rijn

Staaliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin

Jesus' Promise

- “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (Jn. 14:26; see also Jn. 14:16-17;15:26;16:7-8).
- “And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4-5).
- This promise was fulfilled 10 days after Jesus’ ascension and marks the beginning of the New Testament era.

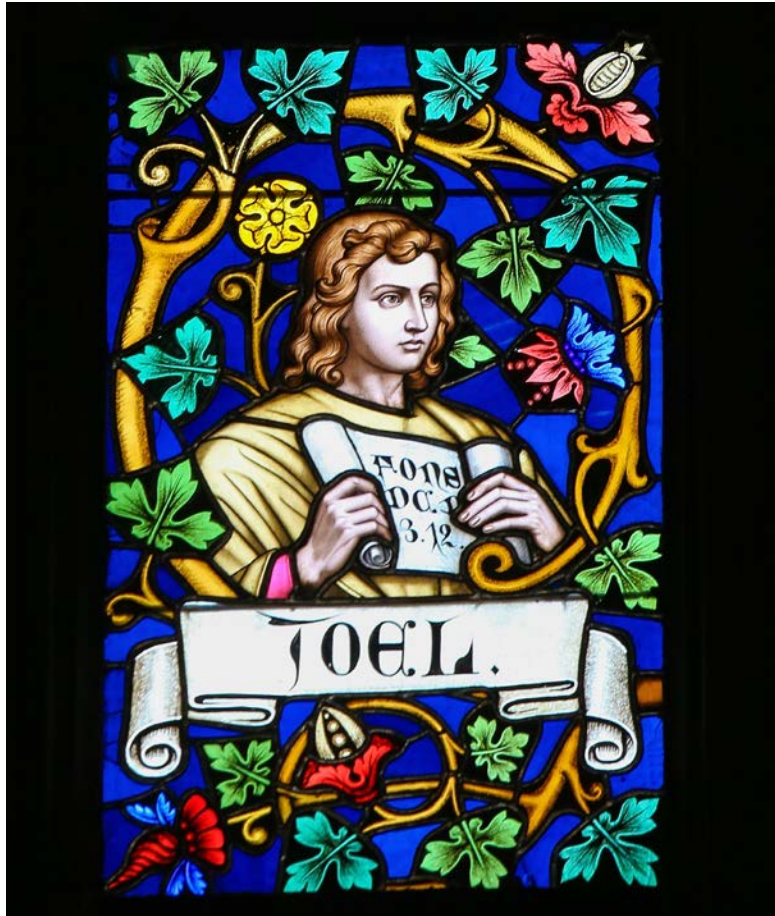
Predictions of the O.T. Prophets

- Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel bear undeniable witness to the fact that the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out on believers who lived under the Old Covenant.
- “For the palace is forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks; **until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high**, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field” (Isa. 32:14-16, ESV).

Ezekiel

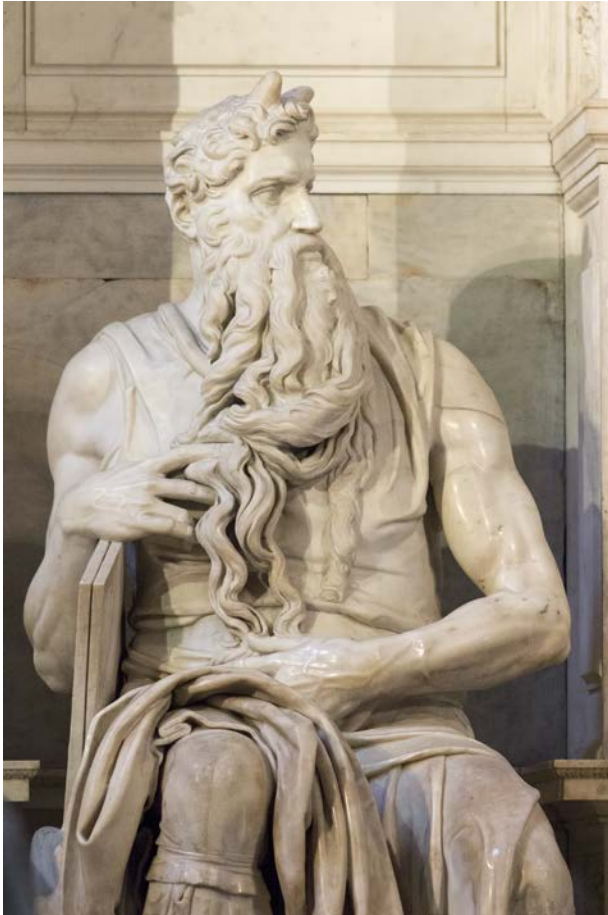
- “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **And I will put my Spirit within you**, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (36:25-27, ESV).
- The valley of dry bones comes to life through the movement of the Spirit of God. Incredibly so, the bones are said to represent the whole house of Israel. The breath of God would be the agent in bringing about a massive resurrection to life.
- The promise is: “He will put my Spirit in you and you will live...” (37:14).

Joel



- “And it shall come to pass afterward, that **I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh**; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit” (2:28-29, ESV).
- Peter claimed this promise had been fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21).

Moses



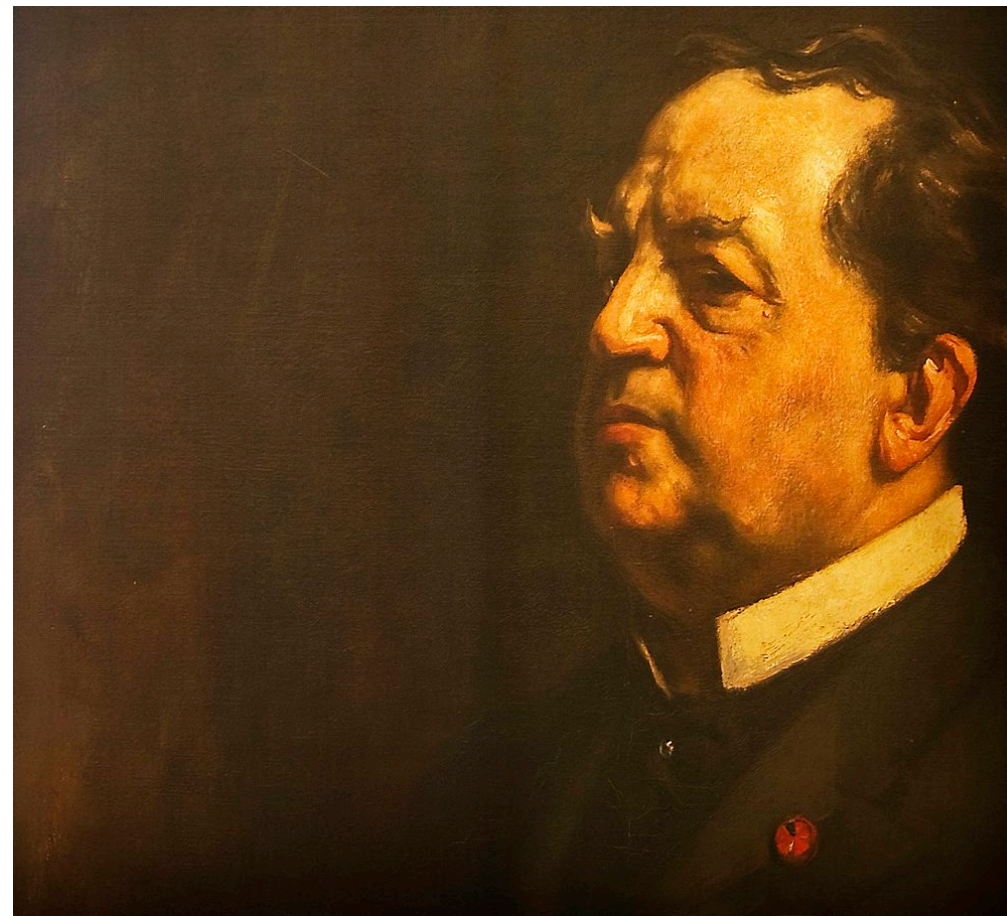
The Moses
Michelangelo

“But Moses said to him, ‘Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, **that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!**” (Numbers 11:29).

The Meaning of These Prophecies

“These prophecies are evidence of the old Testament prophetic conviction that the dispensation of the Holy Spirit in those days was exceedingly imperfect; that the real dispensation of the Holy Spirit was still tarrying; and that only in the days of the Messiah was it to come in all its fulness and glory.”

- Abraham Kuyper



Abraham Kuyper
1837-1920

The Last Prophet

- John the Baptist, the last prophet of the old order, gives us insight into the expectation that the O.T. prophets had about the coming Spirit and how that expectation was met in the coming of Christ.
- “I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk. 1:8).
- “And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit’” (Jn. 1:33).

Pentecost

- At Pentecost, the believers received the promised gift of the Spirit which the Lord had poured out upon them and were baptized with the Spirit.
- The terms “the promise of the Spirit,” “the baptism of the Spirit,” “the gift of the Spirit,” and “the outpouring of the Spirit” are synonymous (Acts 1:4; 2:33,39; 1:5; 11:16-17; 2:17,33).
- Three thousand of those who heard Peter’s first sermon believed and were baptized with water. Although we are not told explicitly that they received the baptism of the Spirit, it is generally held that they did.
- These new believers received the gift of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit simultaneously.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit Today

- If a person does not have the Spirit, he does not belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9).
- New Testament writers assume that the Holy Spirit indwells each and every believer (Rom. 5:5-8; I Cor. 2:12; 3:16; Gal. 3:2; II Tim. 1:14; I John 3:24).
- Christians are never exhorted to receive the Holy Spirit.
- The baptism of the Spirit is the means of entry into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13).
- The purpose of baptism is incorporation “into one body,” namely the body of Christ, the church.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit Today

- The authors of the New Testament are constantly encouraging believers to remember what Christ has done for them.
- The New Testament writers never give the perspective that there is some subsequent experience that Christians must long for, hope for, and seek.

John R.W. Stott

“The overwhelming emphasis of the New Testament letters is not to urge upon Christian readers some entirely new and distinct blessing, but to remind us of what by grace we are, to recall us to it, and to urge us to live by it. This is a very important point and not sufficiently grasped. The horizons of some Christians seem to be bounded by a second and subsequent experience which they call ‘the baptism in the Spirit.’”



“Fullness” in Scripture

- At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples with the result that they were **filled** with the Spirit.
- “And they were all *filled with the Holy Spirit* and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2:4).

N.T. Believers Mentioned

- Believers yielded unto the Lord are said to be *full of the Holy Spirit*.
- **Peter:** “The Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man...’” (Acts 4:8-9).
- **The Seven:** “But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom...” (Acts 6:3).
- **Paul:** “But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him (Elymas the magician)...” (Acts 13:9).
- **Stephen:** “...and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 6:5).
- **Barnabas:** “...for he (Barnabas) was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith...” (Acts 11:24).

Jesus Christ



- Luke records that our Lord, before His temptation, was full of the Holy Spirit.
- “And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led about by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, while tempted by the devil” (Lk. 4:1-2).

Baptism and Fullness

- It is possible for a Christian to be baptized in the Spirit, but not filled with the Spirit.
- A person may be a believer (baptized in the Holy Spirit), but not controlled by the Spirit (the fullness of the Spirit).

Ephesians 5:18

- “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.”
- The tense of the verb, *to be filled* - the present tense - indicates the necessity of **continuously** being filled with the Spirit.
- ***Keep on being filled with the Spirit*** is a clear and simple way of expressing Paul’s intent in this passage.
- The mood of the verb *be filled* in the same text is the imperative. This lets us know that this is a command that needs to be obeyed **increasingly**.
- As we grow in Christian maturity, we should yield ourselves more and more to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.



J. Oswald Sanders

“The indwelling Spirit exercises this control within, from the center of the personality. He enlightens the *intellect* so that there is an ever-deepening insight into spiritual truth. He purifies the *emotions* and affections and fixes them on Christ, for His ministry is always Christocentric. He reinforces the *will*, weakened by sinful indulgence, and imparts power to do the will of God.”

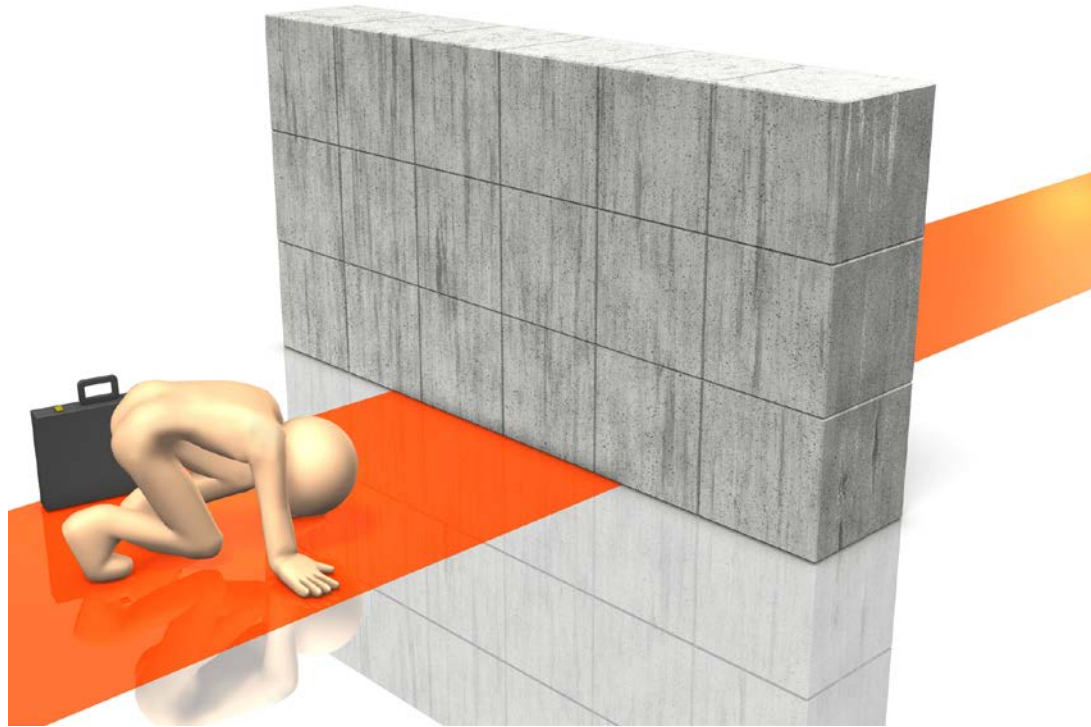
Iron & Fire

Think of placing a piece of iron in a hot fire. At first two distinct substances exist: iron and fire. When the iron is placed in the fire, the iron has penetrated the fire. Soon, however, the fire begins to penetrate the iron and we have (1) the iron in the fire, and (2) the fire in the iron. Though two distinct substances, they have co-mingled and interpenetrated to a point where the two have become one (A.W. Tozer).

How To Be Filled With The Spirit

- First, all sins must be confessed and forsaken. If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear our prayers (Ps. 66:18).
- We must keep coming to the **Fountain** to drink of His fullness.
- “...Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.”’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (Jn. 7:37-39).

Hindrances To Being Filled



- A spirit of self-sufficiency or pride
- Unconfessed sin
- Unbelief
- Unwillingness to surrender
- Grieving the Holy Spirit (doing the works of the flesh; failing to realize His presence in us; failing to respond to His promptings and leadings)
- Quenching the Holy Spirit

Evidences of Fullness

- The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)
- Love (I Cor. 13:1-13)
- Joy (Acts 13:52)
- Peace and hope (Rom. 15:13)
- Speaking, singing and making melody, giving thanks, and submitting (Eph. 5:19-21)
- Oneness (Phil. 2:1-2)
- Prophecy (Lk. 1:67; Acts 13:8-11)
- Speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4)
- Boldness (Acts 4:8, 31)
- Evangelism (Acts 11:24)
- In summary, the fullness of the Spirit manifests itself in worship, fellowship, evangelism, transformed character, and ministry.

Yielded To The Spirit

“For the Spirit to have us, we must yield ourselves to Him. We must be emptied of self to be filled with all of His fullness. Our hands cannot be filled with other things if they are to know the fullness of God. Our hearts cannot be filled with worldly affection and ambition if we are to possess the Spirit without measure. Our souls must be emptied of self when we bring them to the fountains of heaven for the blessing. It seems that Paul’s motto was ‘not I but Christ’ (Gal. 2:20). Oh, that we could surrender ourselves to a like commitment! As we grow in grace, maybe at first it was all of self and none of Thee. Then, it was some of self and some of Thee. Then it was less of self and some of Thee. Then it was less of self and more of Thee. But now, God grant it, it is none of self and all of Thee” (W. A. Criswell).



How Should We Then Live?

- Just as the early Christians were not able to spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire in their own strength, so we must totally rely on the Holy Spirit to lead others to Christ.
- We must never confuse the City of God with the City of Man. The kingdom of God should never be identified with any particular nation, language, or unreached people group.
- “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).
“There is no mistaking the thrust of all this. What we are being told is that supernatural living through supernatural empowering is at the very heart of New Testament Christianity” (J.I. Packer).