

## **Holy Spirit Baptism vs. Water Baptism**

Much confusion exists concerning the various baptisms mentioned in the Bible (cf. Acts 2:38; Matt. 3:11; Matt. 20:22). Some well-meaning people claim that more than one that baptism is still valid, and the majority of the confusion seems to center on the relationship of the believer to water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism. Ephesians 4:5 makes clear that by the time Ephesians was written in A.D. 62 only one baptism was in effect. Consider some of the differences between Holy Spirit baptism and water baptism, both of which are mentioned in the New Testament.

***Different elements*** – One of the primary differences between the two baptisms is that they use two different elements. In water baptism, the element into which one is baptized is obviously water (Acts 2:38; 8:36; 22:16), while in Holy Spirit baptism, the element happens to be the Spirit Himself: “John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). Holy Spirit baptism is obviously not the same as water baptism.

***Different administrators*** – Another notable difference between these two baptisms is the administrator of each one. Only Jesus Christ himself can administer Holy Spirit baptism. John the Baptist stated that God had told him: “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33). On the day of Pentecost, Peter explained that Jesus Himself was responsible for pouring out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33). On the other hand, Jesus commanded His disciples (mere men) to baptize all nations as part of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19; cf. 1 Cor. 1:14).

***Different purposes*** – Holy Spirit baptism had a much different purpose than water baptism. Water baptism was explicitly for salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16), while Holy Spirit baptism confirmed a group’s eligibility to enter God’s kingdom. On the day of Pentecost, Holy Spirit baptism confirmed that the kingdom was opened to Jews everywhere: “All the house of Israel...” (Acts 2:36). Several years later, Holy Spirit baptism again confirmed that entrance into the kingdom was now open to Gentiles as well (Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18). Holy Spirit baptism did not save individuals; rather, it manifested which groups are eligible to be saved in God’s divine plan.

***Different receptions*** – The manner in which each baptism is received is also different. Holy Spirit baptism was involuntary; it was a promise to be received (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8). Those who received Holy Spirit baptism had no choice concerning the time, manner or location in which this baptism took place (Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48). Water baptism, however, was always a command to be obeyed: “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). After Cornelius and his household received Holy Spirit baptism, they were baptized in water for the remission of their sins (Acts 10:47).

***Different durations*** – Ephesians 4:5 indicates that by the writing of Ephesians in A.D. 62, there was just one baptism. The question is: which baptism remained in effect? The answer is found in Matthew 28:18-20 where Jesus commanded his disciples to keep baptizing the lost and teaching these new disciples, “Until the end of the age.” It is to water baptism that Jesus was referring in this passage, and thus it is water baptism for the remission of sins that remains in effect today.

May God help every student of his word to understand his will better.

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