

Notes on the Gift of the Holy Spirit – Acts 2:38

1. The phrase “gift of the Holy Spirit” is found only twice in the New Testament.
 - a. Acts 2:38
 - b. Acts 10:45 regarding the case of the house of Cornelius
 - i. What gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius?
 1. The gift of tongues
 2. Therefore, it was miraculous
 - ii. Who is speaking here?
 1. The apostle Peter
 2. You will not find anyone else other than the Apostle Peter using the specific phrase “gift of the Holy Spirit.”
2. Some past gospel preachers who believed “the gift of the Holy Spirit” is miraculous.
 - a. T. W. Brents
 - b. Z. T. Sweeny
 - c. Joe Warlick (in Firm Foundation 1943)
 - d. Guy N. Woods
 - e. Franklin Camp
 - f. Robert Taylor
 - g. H. Leo Boles - Commentary on Acts
3. Before examining the ending portion of Acts 2:38, one needs to have a good understanding of the prophecy of Joel which begins Peter’s sermon - Joel 2:28-32.
 - a. Joel’s prophecy is about the Holy Spirit giving miraculous gifts to “all flesh”.
 - b. Joel’s prophecy has a limited scope of application - Joel 2:28-29.
 - i. The phrase “all flesh” is limited in scope.
 1. It does not mean every single person of all time.
 2. It means that this prophecy will include both Jew and Gentile.
 3. Also, it has reference only to the Jews and Gentiles of the 1st century.
 - ii. v. 28 refers to the Jews.
 - iii. v. 29 refers to Gentiles.
 - iv. Joel will say in prophetic terms that at a crucial period in time - what Joel refers to as an “afterward” and the New Testament interprets as “the last days” - both Jews and Gentiles will receive miraculous gifts.
 - c. Joel’s prophecy gives us the time when these things would occur - Joel 2:30-31.
 - i. This is part of the prophecy that is given in a highly figurative, apocalyptic style.

- ii. The words used in these verses indicate it would occur during a time of a great event.
 - iii. The “day of the Lord” refers to the death of Christ that brought salvation.
 - 1. This reference to the “day of the Lord” cannot be the second coming.
 - 2. V. 32 indicates there will be a time of salvation by calling on the name of the Lord after this “day of the Lord”.
 - 3. There will not be a second chance of salvation after that time.
 - d. Joel’s prophecy says that the promise of salvation is connected with this outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
 - i. In other words, Joel says when you see this time of miraculous gifts being given, you know that the time calling on the name of the Lord is beginning.
 - ii. Joel shows that the miraculous gifts would not be limited to the Apostles (though they alone would possess all of the miraculous gifts – 2 Corinthians 12:12 – and they would be the only ones with the ability to pass those gifts on to others – Acts 8:14-17).
4. Questions which are asked in regard to this position of the “gift of the Holy Spirit” being miraculous.
- a. Was it not the case that only the apostle performed miracles (Acts 2:43; Acts 5:12-13)?
 - i. It is suggested that there is no record of non-apostles performing miracles until sometime later in Acts – Acts 6:8 – that the gift of the Holy Spirit” is therefore not a reference to miraculous gifts.
 - ii. Answer: The Book of Acts is not a record of everything that occurred at the early period of the church.
 - 1. Only the acts of the apostles are recorded in the early chapters of Acts.
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 12:7 indicates that every member was given at least one of the nine miraculous gifts of the Spirit – 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.
 - b. According to v. 39, should we not receive this gift today?
 - i. Again, what is stated in v. 39 is a limited statement.
 - ii. The phrase “afar off” is a reference to the Gentiles; it is not a time meaning.
 - c. How can we preach all of Acts 2:38 if the gift only applies to miraculous gifts of the 1st century?
 - i. Answer: We just need to explain it and apply it.
 - ii. They did not have the written New Testament at this point.
 - 1. The nine miraculous gifts were intended to give them that word, along with the abilities to confirm it as being from God.
 - 2. This then emphasizes the importance of the Bible to the New Testament Christian today as we now have it in its completed form - 1 Corinthians 13:10-12.

5. Whenever the term “receive” is used in connection with the “Holy Spirit,” the context is miraculous
- a. **John 7:39** – (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given*; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)
 - i. Refers to what had been said in John 7:38.
 - ii. The meaning is a little less obvious at this point in Jesus’ teaching.
 - iii. It points to the gift of the Holy Spirit of Acts 2:38.
 - iv. The context therefore is miraculous gifts.
 - b. **John 20:22** – “And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:”
 - i. These words were spoken by Jesus after His resurrection during one of His appearances to them while they were in Jerusalem.
 - ii. Rather than an actual reception of the Holy Spirit at this point, this appears to be a sort of ceremonial event that anticipates what will occur on the Day of Pentecost.
 - iii. The receiving though is again in a miraculous context.
 - c. **Acts 1:8** – “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you. . . .”
 - i. This was a specific reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit which is wholly different from the “gift of the Holy Spirit.”
 - ii. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was only promised to the apostles – (John 14:26; John 16:13).
 - iii. But again, the connection of “receive” and the “Holy Spirit” is miraculous.
 - d. **Acts 8:14-18** – miraculous context
 - i. The reception was by the laying on of the apostles’ hands.
 - ii. If Acts 2:38 is non-miraculous, then those in Samaria - Acts 8 - would have already received the Holy Spirit before the apostles arrived from Jerusalem.
 - e. **Acts 10:47** – Cornelius and his household “receive” the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - i. What kind of reception was this?
 - ii. They spoke in tongues – other languages (Acts 10:46; Acts 2:4-6).
 - iii. Notice how the record of the account in Acts 10 clearly connects the pouring out of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-45) - a reference back to the promise of Joel (Joel 2:28-32) – to the reception of the “gift of the Holy Ghost”.
 1. Compare this with what we have in Acts 2
 2. As Peter begins his message there, he quotes from Joel 2 which foretold of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit – Acts 2:18
 3. When telling those who gladly received the word on that day that they would receive the gift of the Holy Ghost – Acts 2:38.
 4. As is seen in Acts 10 then, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is parallel with the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. Also, it is not the case that the Holy Spirit is the object that would be poured out.

- b. Rather, Joel is saying that it would be the Holy Spirit that would do the pouring out – that is, the pouring out of spiritual gifts.
 - f. **Acts 19:1-7** – regarding those who had been incorrectly taught by Apollos in the city of Ephesus.
 - i. Acts 19:2 – Paul ask them “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?”
 - ii. In other words, Paul asks them if they had had an apostle lay hands on them.
 - 1. How do we know this?
 - 2. They said “No,” so Paul laid his hands on them to impart miraculous gifts to them.
 - g. **Galatians 3:2** – “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?
 - i. Someone might say that this is non-miraculous.
 - ii. However, Galatians 3:5 shows that it is not.
 - 1. Paul said there was one that ministered to them the Spirit.
 - 2. “ministereth” is (*er-ee-khor-ayg-eh-o*), and according to Thayer, means “supply, furnish, present”.
 - 3. This was accomplished by the laying on of the apostle Paul’s hands upon these in Galatia.
 - h. **1 John 2:27** – “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.”
 - i. A few verses earlier, Paul said they had an unction (same word as anointing, MWC) from the Holy One, and as a result, he said they therefore “know all things”.
 - ii. Because they knew all things.
 - iii. His reception is again miraculous.
6. Now note the phrase “gift of” (the Greek word *doh-rae-on*) from Acts 2:38 and other passages – when in connection with the Holy Spirit the context is always miraculous.
- a. Some have said the gift of **Acts 2:38** is the Holy Spirit.
 - i. This then would make Acts 2:28 a passage that refers to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. While there are indwelling passages, Acts 2:38 is not one of them.
 - iii. The phrase “gift of the Holy Spirit” is an objective genitive meaning that this is something that the Holy Spirit gives – not that the gift is the Holy Spirit Himself.
 - b. **John 4:10** – What is the “gift of God” here?
 - i. Not God
 - ii. It is “living water”
 - c. **Acts 8:20** – what is the “gift of God” here?
 - i. This is something Simon the Sorcerer wanted to purchase.
 - ii. This gift was something that was visible to Simon (Acts 8:18).

- iii. It was a gift that was passed on to others by the laying on of the apostles hands (Acts 8:18-19).
- d. **Acts 10:45** – the gift of the Holy Ghost
 - i. This gift given to house of Cornelius.
 - ii. Again, this specific phrase found only here and in Acts 2:38.
 - iii. Gift is miraculous
- e. **Acts 11:17** – “Forasmuch then as God had given had given them the like gift”
 - i. Peter rehearses to the church at Jerusalem what happened with the House of Cornelius.
 - ii. The “like gift” means that the Gentiles received miraculous gifts as did the Jews.
- f. **Acts 15:8**
 - i. “Giving them [that is the Gentiles, MWC] the Holy Ghost”
 - ii. Peter restates what was said in Acts 11:17
 - iii. What gift is this? Miraculous gifts
- g. **Ephesians 4:8** – “. . . gave gifts unto men”
 - i. According to this passage, this occurred after Jesus ascended into heaven.
 - ii. Also this occurred when he “led captivity captive”.
 1. Those once held captive by the bondage of sin He has freed, and they are now under His authority.
 2. This is simply saying that at the time when the gospel of salvation began to go forth, gifts were given unto men.
 3. What kind of gifts? Miraculous as is indicated by the mention of apostles and prophets in the listing of those who would lead and build up the church - Ephesians 4:11.
 4. Though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned directly in this context (although He is mentioned just a few verses earlier in the listing of the seven ones of unity – Ephesians 4:4), He should be understood.
 - a. Christ is indicated as the giver here.
 - b. Jesus is the giver in the sense that He sent the Holy Spirit when He ascended on high – John 16:7.
- h. **2 Timothy 1:6** – what is the “gift of God” that Timothy received?
 - i. It was given to Timothy by the putting on of the apostle Paul’s hands.
 - ii. Timothy is told to stir up (The original word used here denotes the kindling of a fire, as by bellows, etc – Barnes) this gift.
 - iii. It seems this is a reference to the miraculous gifts which would have been passed on from Paul to Timothy as Peter and John passed them on to those who had been baptized in Samaria – Acts 8:14-17.