

A Reader's Question About Acts 8: "Samaria and The Spirit"

Each week we invite comments and questions from those reading our articles in *Arkansas Weekly*. We are not infallible, so your thoughts are welcomed. We received an anonymous letter in response to the article "Acts 8:5-25: Samaria and The Spirit." The letter contained several typed question marks followed by the words of Acts 9:17, but it asked no question and made no statement. I suppose the suggestion is that the apostles were not the only ones who passed the Spirit's miraculous power to others. Read Acts 9:10-18 to begin our study.

In Acts 9:17, Ananias said that God sent him so that two things could happen: Saul could receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Which does the Bible say happened when Ananias laid his hands on Saul? Acts 9:18 says *he received His sight at once* but does not say "he received The Spirit at once." Is there Scriptural evidence to show that Saul was not immediately filled by the Holy Spirit?

Acts 8:14, 17 *Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, . . . Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.* By the decision of all the apostles two apostles left Jerusalem, came to Samaria, and gave the miraculous power of the Spirit to some, laying their hands on those saints. If someone other than the apostles could do this, why didn't Philip, on whom the apostles had laid their hands, do it?

Acts 8:18 *Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given.* What Peter and John did in Samaria, Paul later did in Ephesus (Acts 19:6). Nowhere in Scripture are we told that the Spirit came upon someone by the hands of a non-apostle, such as Ananias.

Signs of an apostle Whenever and wherever Paul was filled with the Spirit, he was equipped with *the signs of an apostle* (2 Cor. 12:12). How did the original apostles receive the power to do these signs? What were the signs of an apostle?

The original apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit directly from heaven, without involving any man's hands (Acts 2:2-4). Paul said he was inferior to the apostles in no way, so why would Paul be filled with the same Spirit and power by man's hands (2 Cor. 12:11)?

One sign of an apostle was that *through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given* (Acts 8:18). Paul showed this sign in Acts 19:6. If Paul had the same power as the apostles, why would he be filled with the Spirit in a different way than the apostles?

If Ananias did not give Saul the Holy Spirit by his hands, why did he say he came to Saul so Saul could be filled with the Spirit? Is it possible that Ananias was sent to Saul so that he could receive the Spirit but that Ananias was not the one who gave the Spirit to Saul? Consider this. From the events of Acts 8, is this a true statement—"Philip came to Samaria so they could hear the gospel and receive the Holy Spirit"? Philip delivered the gospel and because they received it, the apostles came and by their hands some Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Ananias could be sent to begin the process that would later result in Saul being filled with the Holy Spirit. Ananias told Saul to *Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord* (Acts 22:16; Is this what your pastor preaches?). Would the Spirit fill Saul with the signs of an apostle if his sins were not washed away? No, just like the apostles Peter and John would not have come to Samaria if the people had not received the word. Ananias' role in Saul becoming a Christian was an essential part of the process of Saul being filled with the Spirit and showing the signs of an apostle. Ananias had the same abilities as

Philip—he had the ability to miraculously heal. He lacked the same ability that Philip lacked—the ability to lay his hands on men by which they would receive the Spirit. Maybe the Spirit of Truth recorded the details of Acts 8 and 9 close to each other to help us rightly divide the word of truth on this topic.

If we stick with what the Bible says and avoid unnecessary assumptions, we must admit that we are not told when Saul was filled with the Spirit. But, based on what we do know about the signs of an apostle, we can conclude that Saul did not receive the Holy Spirit by Ananias' hands.

Why does it matter whether Saul was filled with the Spirit with or without Ananias' hands? The reason that many people want to believe that Saul received the Holy Spirit by Ananias' hands is because they do not want to believe that the ability to give the Spirit was limited to the apostles. Many people admit that there are no apostles today, so if giving the Spirit by human hands is a sign of an apostle, then no one is giving the Holy Spirit's miraculous power today. If this were widely accepted, think about how many television programs, radio programs, and "miracle crusades" would no longer be watched, heard, or funded. Think about how many claims, both sincere and knowingly false, that have been attributed to the Holy Spirit would then be exposed as false. Think about how many sermons that have begun by "I didn't know what I was going to say today, but the Spirit right now has supernaturally laid this on my heart and tongue. . ." would then be silenced. Think of how many man-made churches would dwindle and die.

This topic matters because it is related to the topic of the role of the apostles, the miraculous reception of the Holy Spirit, and the presence or absence of miracles today. In each of these areas, as patient, persistent workman we can all rightly divide the word of truth and understand the will of the Lord.

To you who disagree, I offer these final questions--

If the Holy Spirit is still being given today, as some claim Ananias did, who is still having conversations with Jesus, as Ananias did? Who today is healing blinded eyes in an instant? Where are scales falling from the eyes of once-blinded men?

The day you say you were saved, did you have a teacher like Ananias who said "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16)? If you were you taught another gospel, is it possible you have received another spirit (2 Cor. 11:4)?