

# Chapter 12

## 'Receive the Holy Spirit'

21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, *their sins* have been forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they have been retained."<sup>1</sup>

Chapters 2-11 dealt with Matthew 16:13-20, perhaps the most important text in the New Testament for Roman Catholic theology. However, two other texts are often cited along with Matthew 16:13-20, namely, John 20:21-23 and 21:15-19. Chapters 12 and 13 present a study of the former and chapter 14 the latter.

### Commissioning the Disciples: Verse 21

In verse 21 Jesus says, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." This is clearly a commission by Jesus. In fact, it is the first of three. The second is given on a mountain in Galilee,<sup>2</sup> and the third on the Mt. of Olives just outside Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting that John uses two different Greek words for "send" here. The first is ἀπεσταλκεν<sup>4</sup> ("has sent") while the second is πέμπω<sup>5</sup> ("am sending"). However, the words seem to be used interchangeably.<sup>6</sup> The perfect tense

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1 John 20:21-23.

2 Matt. 28:16-20.

3 Acts 1:3-11.

4 3rd person singular perfect active indicative of ἀποστέλλω.

5 1st person singular present active indicative.

6 Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, V:314: "Jesus has often spoken of the Father's sending him using both *apostellō* and *pempō*. Here he employs both words in practically the same sense." Note also that in 17:18 the same verb is used for both sendings

of ἀπεσταλκεν is perhaps used to imply that the mission of Jesus on earth is now completed.<sup>7</sup>

The important point to establish in this verse is that Jesus addressed all the disciples, not just "the twelve" (here ten). It would be difficult to argue otherwise, for there is no indication in the text that those addressed in verse 21 are not all those in the room.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, that all those in the room are addressed remains the only natural interpretation.

But the words of Jesus that link verses 21, 22, and 23 together form a chain that nothing in the grammar or context breaks. If this commission in verse 21 was addressed to all the disciples in the room and not just the apostles, then so was the clause about receiving the Holy Spirit (v. 22) and the clause about forgiving and retaining sins (v. 23). Therefore, this power in verse 23, of whatever it consisted, was given to all the disciples and not just the apostles, contrary to the claim of Catholic theology.<sup>9</sup>

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(ἀποστειλω in the aorist tense).

7 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 846.

8 Morris, *ibid.*, p. 845, n. 50, makes the following comment: "Bernard maintains that the words apply to the apostles alone and not to any others who may have been present. But he presents no real evidence that this is the case. He argues that in passages like 13:20 the apostles are in mind and that 'Language of this kind is addressed in the Fourth Gospel to the apostles *alone*' [emphasis original]. But this is begging the question. The indications are that in this chapter these words are addressed to others than apostles. To most it seems self-evident that the words of 13:20 are quite general and apply to others than the apostles."

9 It might also be noted that if, as the Catholic Church claims, the power granted in v. 23 was limited to the apostles, thus enabling it later to be limited only to the Catholic bishops as the successors of the apostles, then there is a problem: Thomas was not there. Alford, *The Greek Testament*, I:910, makes this observation: "That *no formal gifts of Apostleship were now formally conferred, is plain by the absence of Thomas*, who in that case would be no apostle in the same sense in which the rest were" (emphasis original). One could, of course, argue that if Jesus intended to bestow this power on the apostles alone, Thomas was in his purview whether present or not. However, such an argument would be entirely gratuitous. It would be far easier to argue that if Jesus' intent rather was to address these words to all those in the room, and thus by implication the entire church, then Thomas, those to be added to the church during the period of the Book of Acts, and those to be added from future generations were all within his purview.

## "Receive the Holy Spirit": Verse 22

Verse 22 is short, but there are five important issues to be addressed.

### "He Breathed on Them"

The Greek reads as follows:

και τουτο ειπων<sup>10</sup> ενεφουσησεν<sup>11</sup> και λεγει<sup>12</sup> αυτοις...

A literal translation would be this: "And this having said, he breathed on [them] and says to them..."<sup>13</sup>

The fascinating word here is the verb ενεφουσησεν (*enephusēsen*) from εμφουσαω (*emphusaō*). The word is used in the New Testament only here.<sup>14</sup> According to Arndt and Gingrich, the basic meaning is to "*breathe on τινί someone*."<sup>15</sup> The NASB translates this clause, "He breathed on them." "Them" is not in the Greek, but in this context "them" is probably implied by the verb and the use of αυτοις ("them") in the next clause.<sup>16</sup> But what is the meaning of this action?

Although εμφουσαω is used in the New Testament only here, it is used eleven times in the LXX.<sup>17</sup> The most important of

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10 Masculine nominative singular 2nd aorist active participle of λεγω, *to say*.

11 3rd person singular 1st aorist active indicative of εμφουσαω.

12 3rd person singular present active indicative of λεγω.

13 However this action is to be explained, it is likely that Jesus "breathed on them" as a body and not separately on each individual. See J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007; original publication dates, 1856-69), IV:396.

14 Such a word is called a *hapax legomenon* (Greek for "once said").

15 AG, p. 257.

16 "Them" in the first clause does represent a textual variant, but one that invokes no disagreement. The uncial D (Bezae Cantabrigiensis) does have αυτοις (*them*) in the first clause, but the UBS committee did not think it even worth noting as a variant in Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1971) or in their textual apparatus in the *The Greek New Testament*. On the other hand, Ethelbert Stauffer, "εμφουσαω," *TDNT*, II:536, n. 7, comments that "not inappropriately, D adds an αυτοις."

17 Gen. 2:7; 1 Kings 17:21; Tobit 6:8; 11:11; Job 4:21; Wisdom of Solomon 15:11; Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 43:4; Nahum 2:1; Ezek. 21:31; 22:20; 37:9. Note that the LXX contains apocryphal books as well as the canonical books of the OT.

these is Genesis 2:7:

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

The phrase, "and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," in the LXX reads as follows:

και ενεφουσησεν εις το προσωπον αυτου πνοην ζωης

"and [και] breathed [ενεφουσησεν] into [εις] the nose [το προσωπον] of him [αυτου] breath [πνοην] of life [ζωης]"

Here not only is the object of ενεφουσησεν explicitly supplied, but so is the preposition itself (εις, *into* or *on*). προσωπον<sup>18</sup> (*prosōpon*) normally means *face* or *countenance*.<sup>19</sup> However, though the Hebrew noun which it translates, נָפֶס, can also mean *face*, primary meaning of this Hebrew word is *nostril* or *nose*.<sup>20</sup> πνοη (*pnoē*) can mean *wind* or *breath*,<sup>21</sup> while the Hebrew noun it translates, נְשָׁמָה, is limited to *breath*, from נָשַׁם meaning *to pant*.<sup>22</sup>

The Hebrew verb translated by εμψυσω is נָפַח.<sup>23</sup> Its basic meaning is *to breathe* or *to blow*.<sup>24</sup> It can be used of breathing in a literal sense,<sup>25</sup> but in Genesis 2:7 the "breathing" is clearly used figuratively of creating or transmitting life, in this case physical life.

εμψυσω is also used to translate נָפַח in Ezekiel 37:9:

Then He said to me, "Prophecy to the breath [רוּחַ],  
prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath [רוּחַ],

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18 Neuter, accusative, singular.

19 AG, pp. 728-729; on rare occasions it can mean *person*.

20 BDB, p. 60.

21 AG, p. 686.

22 BDB, p. 675.

23 As a 3rd person masculine singular Qal imperfect.

24 BDB, pp. 655-656.

25 Jer. 15:9.

'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Come from the four winds,"<sup>26</sup>  
O breath [רוּחַ], and breathe [נָפַח ---> εμψυσῶ] on  
these slain, that they come to life.'"

Rather than נְשָׁמָה ("breath") as in Genesis 2:7, this time "breath" is רוּחַ, *breath, wind, or spirit*, used in all three ways in the Old Testament<sup>27</sup> with the context deciding in each case. Nevertheless, as in Genesis 2:7, נָפַח ("to breathe") is used as a figure of creating physical life in the dry bones. Indeed, Genesis 2:7 would seem to form the background to the description in Ezekiel 37:9. Of course, in the Ezekiel passage the image of dry bones coming to life is itself used as a symbol of Israel's spiritual restoration at the second advent of Messiah.<sup>28</sup> However, that does not change the figurative use of נָפַח ---> εμψυσῶ in this passage.

To summarize, the figures in both of these two texts are the same:<sup>29</sup> in both Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37:9, the breathing (εμψυσῶ, the verb used in John 20:22) is a figure of creating physical life. Therefore, though the figure must be different in John 20:22 since physical life was not created, it likely is similar.

### The Work of the Holy Spirit In the Old Testament and At Pentecost

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to argue the point,

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26 This word is also רוּחַ but here in the plural is obviously used in the sense of "winds." According to Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 214, "the four winds" is "a Semitic expression for the four corners of the earth."

27 *BDB*, pp. 924-926.

28 See vv. 11-14. For the argument that this passage in Ezekiel is speaking of "the revival and restoration of Israel to spiritual life" and not about physical resurrection of individuals, see Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel*, pp. 212-14.

29 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 846, n. 53, has a slightly more nuanced view. In Gen. 2:7, there is the picture of a new creation that resulted from this "breathing"; in Ezek. 37:9 there is the picture of life from the dead as a result of this "breathing." He further suggests that both thoughts might be in the mind of Jesus when he performed his symbolic act of "breathing."

but the position is taken that believers in the Old Testament were regenerated and permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit in the same way that believers today are.<sup>30</sup> Salvation is really not possible without these works of the Spirit.

However, there is one work of the Holy Spirit that all agree occurred during the period of the Old Testament: empowerment for divinely assigned tasks. For this work, the Holy Spirit would come upon someone to enable him to perform a specific task<sup>31</sup> and then, presumably, leave him.<sup>32</sup>

If these points are accepted, two conclusions follow. First, the disciples were already regenerated, saved, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and thus members of the *qāhāl* or Messianic community, both when Jesus performed the act of breathing on them in John 20:22 and on the day of Pentecost. Second, it follows that any descent upon them by the Spirit subsequent to their salvation, either in John 20:22 or at Pentecost, must be for the purpose of empowerment. That this was the case at least at Pentecost seems incontrovertible for the following reasons.

(1) The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was explicitly connected to the new task now confronting believers: to empower them to carry the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to

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30 This conclusion is argued at length by Leon Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), chapters 7 and 8. Texts such as John 7:37-39 and 14:17, often cited against this view, are also carefully analyzed.

31 For example, judges: Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14); craftsmen: Bezalel (Exod. 31:3; 35:31), David (1 Chron. 28:11, 12), and Hiram (1 Kings 7:13, 14); civil administrators: Moses (Num. 11:17; Isa. 63:10-12), Joshua (Num. 27:18; Deut. 34:9), Saul (1 Sam. 11:6; 16:14), and David (1 Sam. 16:13; Ps. 51:11).

32 In 1 Sam. 16:14 it is stated that the Spirit of Yahweh departed from Saul. According to Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, p. 62: "He [Saul] is the only person of whom this is said. Of others, the fact is implied, since the nature of the Spirit's coming on them was only temporary in kind, but it is never stated."

the remotest part of the earth.<sup>33</sup>

The disciples, all of them and not just the Twelve, were instructed to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with this power by the Holy Spirit:

And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.<sup>34</sup>

Leon Wood concludes,

Some persons, such as those called to the ministry of evangelism, no doubt have this aspect of empowerment more than others. The clear implication of these passages, however, is that all children of God have it in some degree. All, then, should realize this and make use of it. Sadly, many do not, and this can only be displeasing to the Holy Spirit who grants the power. Witnessing the gospel message is a task in which every Christian should be engaged.<sup>35</sup>

(2) In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter states that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that had just occurred was a fulfillment, or at least a partial fulfillment, of the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32. This prophecy by Joel is clearly of a future work of empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

Nothing he [Joel] said [regarding this pouring out of the Spirit] concerns regeneration, indwelling, sealing, or filling. It concerns, rather, empowerment, the one aspect of work that is said in the Old Testament to have transpired at that time. He spoke of people prophesying, dreaming dreams, and seeing visions, all aspects of empowerment. The contrast in Joel's mind [between the Spirit's work of empowerment in the Old Testament and his work of empowerment described in this prediction], then, did not concern the type of work the Spirit would do in the future, but aspects of empowerment and the number of people who would be so empowered.<sup>36</sup>

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33 Acts 1:8.

34 Luke 24:49.

35 Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, p. 77.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

The conclusion, then, stands firm: the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was to empower the disciples to perform the task set before them. That task, which all believers are called to perform, was to carry to the gospel to all nations.<sup>37</sup> This empowering work of Holy Spirit will continue until the second advent.<sup>38</sup>

### The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

All four Gospels record the statement of John the Baptist that though he baptized with water, in the future Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> What the resurrected Jesus later said to the disciples in Acts 1:5 makes it clear that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was this baptism he was to perform. Why was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to empower believers to proclaim the gospel called a "baptism"?

First, the descriptions of this outpouring of the Spirit should be noted. Three distinct verbs are used.

- In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells the disciples that they "will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." The English translation is accurate: the verb *επερχομαι* means *to come over* or *to come upon*.<sup>40</sup>
- In Acts 2:17 God states that "I will pour out of my

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37 Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8. Note, however, that the empowerment given to all the disciples at Pentecost for the task of proclaiming the gospel included speaking in the native languages of the many Jews who had journeyed to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (called the Feast of Weeks in the OT; Exod. 34:22). This aspect of the empowerment was specific to that particular need at that particular time and was not intended to accompany every occurrence of this empowerment of the Spirit to proclaim the gospel.

38 John 7:37-39 and 14:17 could be taken to imply that the church began at Pentecost, a view I do not support; see Appendix 1. However, these texts say nothing about the creation of a new entity. Rather, they describe this new work of empowerment by the Holy Spirit on those who were already believers at that point in time--and thus members of the already existing *qāhāl* or Messianic community--to preach the gospel to all nations.

39 Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33.

40 AG, p. 284. Note this verb is also used in the LXX at Isa. 32:15 ("...till the Spirit is poured on us from on high...") where

*επερχομαι* is used to translate עָרַה, used here in the Niphal stem meaning *to be poured out* (BDB, p. 788).

Spirit upon all flesh" (KJV). Again, the English translation is accurate: the verb ἐκχέω means *to pour out*.<sup>41</sup> Peter is here quoting the LXX at Joel 2:18, which uses this same Greek verb to translate תִּפְשֹׁ, which likewise means *to pour out*.<sup>42</sup>

- In Acts 10:44-45 Luke, referring to the household of Cornelius, states that "the Holy Spirit fell upon [ἐπιπίπτω] all those who were listening to the message" and that "the Holy Spirit had been poured out [ἐκχέω]" on them just as he had been at Pentecost. The verb in verse 44, ἐπιπίπτω, can be used figuratively of extraordinary events in the sense of *to come upon someone*.<sup>43</sup>

Second, since John connects his baptism with water to Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit,<sup>44</sup> there must therefore be some analogy between the two events. Also, since the baptism with the Holy Spirit is described so forcefully with various verbs of similar import, this suggests that the analogy is in the verbal description.

Now of course the disciples knew exactly the actions performed by John; we do not, and the mode of baptism is in fact a matter of considerable historical debate. It seems, therefore, a logical procedure to use the baptism with the Spirit, which is very clearly described as a "pouring out" and "coming upon," as pointing to the proper analogy: John poured out water on his converts.<sup>45</sup> The analogy, therefore, is as follows: as John poured out water on his converts to symbolize washing away sin,<sup>46</sup> so Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples to effect their empowerment.

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41 AG, p. 246. It can be used literally of liquids or figuratively as here.

42 BDB, p. 1049. This Hebrew verb is also used in Exod. 4:9 to describe pouring out water on the ground, and this same Greek word is again used to translate it in the LXX. Similarly in 1 Sam. 7:6.

43 AG, p. 297. The LXX uses this word to translate נָפַל, a common word meaning *to fall* (BDB, p. 656), in Ezek. 11:5: "Then the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me..."

44 Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:3:16; John 1:33; cf. Acts 1:5.

45 It should be noted that βαπτίζω is also used to describe this same event even though none of these other two verbs imply an immersion. Hence the argument that βαπτίζω means immersion is difficult to sustain.

46 See Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Acts 22:16.

Note that this outpouring of the Holy Spirit was upon all those who were believers at that moment. It is the clear implication of Peter's claim with regard to the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that this empowerment to enable believers to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth was to be given to all subsequent believers as well.<sup>47</sup> That all believers were to receive it distinguished this example of empowerment from examples in the Old Testament. Since all believers were to have it, it became the mark, so to speak, of salvation and constituted incorporation into the body of believers, the body of Christ, the *qāhāl*, or Messianic community. But it is also called a "baptism," and these observations provide the explanation of 1 Corinthians 12:13:

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Paul here uses the same phrase as that used by Luke in Acts 1:5: *εν πνευματι*. The Greek preposition *εν* can be used in the sense of *in*, *with*, or *by*. However, when used in the same expression with *πνευματι* in connection with a "baptism," it is most unlikely that it is used in a different sense in 1 Corinthians 12:13 from that in Acts 1:5.<sup>48</sup> Since Jesus is clearly the baptizer in Acts 1:5, he must also be the baptizer in 1 Corinthians 12:13. Therefore, as those at Pentecost were baptized "with" the Holy Spirit, so Paul is saying that we also are all baptized "with" the Holy Spirit into one body. Being baptized with the Holy Spirit, that is, having the Holy Spirit poured out upon us for empowerment to proclaim the gospel, is the event that officially places us into the body of Christ.<sup>49</sup>

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47 Cf. also Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-46; 19:1-6.

48 Cf. the argument by Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 203-204.

49 The *qāhāl* or Messianic community, consisting of saved disciples of Messiah, was already in existence at the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (see Appendix 1 at the end of this book, especially the section, "The Alternative Offered"). Subsequent to that event, however, every new believer was granted this same empowerment. Contrary to Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, pp. 136-137, no argument can be constructed here for the beginning of "the church" = the *qāhāl* at Pentecost.

## What Occurred in John 20:22?

To summarize the investigation so far:

- The expression, "breathed on [them]" (ενεφυσησεν), seems to reflect Old Testament usage in the two passages where the LXX uses this same Greek word, εμφυσᾶω, to translate פָּנָה:

Genesis 2:7:

The breathing is a figure of creating physical life

Ezekiel 37:9:

The breathing is again a figure of creating physical life

- The outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was to empower the already regenerated and indwelt disciples for the task of carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- This outpouring or baptism of the Spirit was given to all the believers on the day of Pentecost; it has been given to every subsequent new believer at the point of salvation.

The question can now be addressed: what actually occurred in John 20:22?

In an exceptionally thorough paper, M. M. B. Turner reviews the various historical answers to this question.<sup>50</sup> He writes,

Few passages in John offer quite the range of problems that John 20:19-23 presents. We shall attempt to sharpen the issues by giving a critique of two opposed theories each of which has received considerable scholarly support.<sup>51</sup>

The two views are these:

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50 M. M. B. Turner, "The Concept of Receiving the Spirit in John's Gospel," *Vox Evangelica* 10 (1977):24-42. The material summarized above is taken from part III of his paper dealing with John 20:19-23; part II concentrates on the Paraclete promises earlier in the gospel.

51 Ibid., p. 28.

(1) John 20:22 depicts the full giving of the Paraclete.

(2) It only symbolically promises the Paraclete.

Turner does not believe that Pentecost constituted a "single 'definitive' giving of the Spirit."<sup>52</sup> If Pentecost were such an event, that would immediately eliminate (1). He does, nevertheless, argue against view (1) on other grounds. View (2), which Turner also rejects, is taken up in more detail below. His own view is somewhat anticlimactic, if such a term can be applied outside the telling of a story.<sup>53</sup>

I take the Pentecostal event in Acts 2 as the giving of the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of the Paraclete passages in John and Jesus' statements in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4 and 8. There are, therefore, but two viable options one can take: did the disciples "receive"<sup>54</sup> the Holy Spirit<sup>55</sup> in some way at this event recorded in John 20:22, or was this a symbolic action on the part of Jesus simply to picture what would actually occur at Pentecost, as per view (2)?<sup>56</sup>

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52 Ibid., p. 25.

53 "John 20:22 may then be understood as complementary to 17:17-19 and a fulfillment of it. The disciples confronted by the risen Lord, and commissioned anew, now experience Jesus' message (in its totality) as Spirit and life at a much deeper level than has been possible until then" (Turner, "The Concept of Receiving the Spirit in John's Gospel," p. 35). Perhaps this view would not seem anticlimactic if one could discern what it means.

54 λαβετε ("receive") is a 2nd person plural 2nd aorist active imperative of λαμβανω, to receive or to take.

55 The expression, πνευμα αγιον ("Holy Spirit"), is anarthrous (no definite article "the"). Other times the expression does have the definite article (e.g., το πνευμα το αγιον in 14:26). However, as Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, V:314, points out, "No real distinction is to be observed, for Holy Spirit is treated as a proper name with or without the article."

56 For those who accept the authority of the seven ecumenical councils, the issue has already been decided, and with characteristic humility. In the fifth ecumenical council, A.D. 553 (the Second Council of Constantinople), it was decreed, "If anyone defends the impious Theodore of Mopsuestia...[who] has dared, among numerous other blasphemies, to say that when after the resurrection the Lord breathed upon his disciples, saying, 'Receive the Holy Ghost,' he did not really give them the Holy Spirit, but that he breathed upon them only as a sign...let him be anathema." Vol. XIV, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, p. 315, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, 14 vols., eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979).

Wood argues for the latter view:

The relationship between Jesus' action here and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost following is a debated question...

The answer most in keeping with the overall teaching of Scripture is that Jesus did not actually impart the Holy Spirit at this time, but that His action was symbolic of what would happen shortly on Pentecost. This is evidenced by the following considerations: (1) Nothing different in the lives of the disciples is demonstrated at this time, to show that a new work of the Holy Spirit began then; (2) Jesus Himself said, following this time, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:5), and again, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you (Acts 1:8); and (3) on Pentecost, ten days after Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit did come in a dramatic fashion...Jesus' action and words at this earlier time, then, were a sign and pledge of what would happen. That He breathed on the disciples, prior to speaking the words, was to show them the origin of the Spirit when He would come. The Spirit would proceed from the Son, like the breath was proceeding at the moment from His mouth.<sup>57</sup>

Leon Morris takes the former view:<sup>58</sup>

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57 Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, pp. 87-88. At the second ellipsis in the above quotation, Wood passingly remarks that this "dramatic" coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples constituted the beginning of the "church." That is not my view; see the section, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit" in this chapter. Tenney, *The Gospel of John*, p. 193, agrees with Wood that verse 22 refers to Pentecost and states simply, "This was the initial announcement of which Pentecost was the historic fulfillment."

58 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., in *The Anchor Bible*, gen. eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1970), II:1038 cites a survey by Scholte of conservative views on this question showing that most agree with Morris and think that the Holy Spirit was given on this occasion in some capacity that differs from that on Pentecost. However, many suggestions have been made regarding the precise distinction. Liberal critical scholars are free to take a different approach to the problem. Brown, apparently placing himself in this camp, argues that "we may hold that functionally each [account, John 20 and Acts 2] is describing the same event; the one gift of the Spirit to his followers by the risen and ascended Lord...In

The relation of this gift to that made on the day of Pentecost is obscure....The circumstances of the two gifts are completely different. And, whereas that in Acts 2 is followed immediately by some very effective preaching, no sequel to this gift [in John 20:22] is narrated. It is the teaching of the New Testament that "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit" (I Cor. 12:4), and the problem is probably to be solved along these lines. It is false alike to the New Testament and to the Christian experience to maintain that there is but one gift of the Spirit. Rather the Spirit is continually manifesting Himself in new ways. So John tells us of one gift and Luke of another.<sup>59</sup>

Both of these men are scholars of the highest order. However, there are problems with both views as stated. Regarding the three arguments raised by Wood:

*Argument (1):* There was in fact something that changed immediately; what it was is stated when I present my view in the next section, "The Nature of This Work."

*Argument (2):* This point is irrelevant unless one already assumes that the baptism with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is what Jesus referred to by the statement, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Such an assumption would be circular reasoning.

*Argument (3):* The Holy Spirit was indeed poured out on the day of Pentecost to empower believers to carry out the Great Commission. This in no way argues that the disciples in John 20:22 could not have "received" some different type of empowerment by the Holy Spirit or that Jesus' statement in John 20:22 was "a sign and pledge of what would happen" at Pentecost. For this point to be listed as an argument in Wood's case is again circular reasoning.

In the absence of strong evidence that Jesus did not impart the Holy Spirit in some sense in John 20:22, the

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particular, there is no insurmountable obstacle in the fact that John and Acts assign a different date to the gift of the Spirit" (pp. 1038-39). On the contrary, there indeed is a serious "obstacle" to such a view for any scholar who takes a high view of Scripture, which does not admit contradictions.

59 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 847.

natural presumption is clearly that this language indicates that he did. Westcott is correct: "To regard the words and act [in John 20:22] as a promise only and a symbol of the future gift is wholly arbitrary and unnatural."<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, I suggest that Jesus actually did impart the Holy Spirit to those disciples and that this impartation implies a specific work of empowerment that the Holy Spirit performed then and there in the lives of these disciples. However, Westcott's description of this work is wholly unsatisfactory. He claims that it is

the power of the new life proceeding from the Person of the Risen Christ...The relation of the Pascal to the Pentecostal gift is therefore the relation of quickening to empowering.<sup>61</sup>

"Quickening," or making alive, is the work of the Spirit called regeneration. Wood is almost certainly correct in his view that those addressed in John 14-16 had already been regenerated.<sup>62</sup> Since they were also present in John 20:22, this work of the Spirit could not be regeneration.

Morris, who agrees that there is a specific impartation and work of the Holy Spirit in John 20:22, nevertheless gives no hint as to what it might be.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, he, like

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60 B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1908), II:351.

61 Ibid., II:350-351. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, II:1037, also identifies this work of the Spirit as regeneration: "Symbolically, then, John is proclaiming that, just as in the first creation God breathed a living spirit into man, so now in the moment of the new creation Jesus breathes his own Holy Spirit into the disciples, giving them eternal life."

62 Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, pp. 85-87. See also Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, IV:396: "Our Lord cannot have meant that the disciples were now to 'receive the Holy Ghost' for the first time. They had doubtless received Him in the day when they were first converted and believed. Whether they realized it or not, the Holy Ghost was in their hearts already. 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.' (1 Cor. xii.3.)"

63 J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), I:118-119, proposes that what occurred in John 20:22 was simply a filling of the Spirit, a repeatable action in a Christian's life: "Some who would sharply divide the ministry of the Holy Spirit endeavor to show that although Jesus, on this occasion, breathed, symbolically, and said, 'Receive ye the Holy Spirit,' yet the disciples did not receive the Holy Spirit then and there, but had to wait until the day of Pentecost. On the contrary, the symbolical act

Wood, incorrectly sees "no sequel to this gift."

The key to determining what work of empowerment did result from this impartation of the Holy Spirit is to compare its description in John 20:22 with the event in Luke 24:45. Luke 24:33-49 likely records the same appearance of Jesus.<sup>64</sup> Comparing the two descriptions, then, in John 20:22 he states that Jesus "breathed on them and said to them 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" In Luke 24:45 he states that Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand

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of breathing surely signifies that the disciples did then and there receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit. The filling of the Spirit may be a repeated act in the experience of the child of God in any dispensation. For the purposes of the topic under discussion, it should be clear from John 20:22 that the reception of the Holy Spirit, a filling of the Holy Spirit, is not confined to special occasions and the unfolding of the dispensations, but is always available for the Lord's people." This view is certainly better than Westcott's, but I prefer the proposal offered in the following paragraphs.

64 Luke 24:33-43 and John 20:19-23 almost certainly describe the same event; see e.g., A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1922), pp. 245-246, and Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1981; original publication date, 1887), p. 507. The difficult question, though, is whether Luke 24:44-49 also describes this event. Robertson lists it as a description of a subsequent appearance, described also by Acts 1:3-8 (p. 250). However, it is probably better to follow Alford, Godet, and others. For example, Alford, *The Greek Testament*, I:673, writes, "The following discourse [vv. 44-49] apparently contains a summary of many things said during the last forty days before the ascension..." A more recent author, G. Coleman Luck, *Luke: The Gospel of the Son of Man* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960), p. 123-124, agrees: "Though at first glance verses 44-49 appear to be a continuation of what Christ said to the apostles at the time of this opening manifestation, close attention seems to indicate that such is not the case. They rather represent a general summary of the teaching of the Lord Jesus during the entire forty days of postresurrection ministry." Godet, pp. 507-510, also agrees, but his far more detailed analysis is vital to my view of John 20:22 presented in this chapter. On p. 509 after noting that τὸ ἐν v. 45 "may embrace an indefinite space of time," Godet goes on to argue that "this more general sense harmonizes with the fragmentary character of the report given of these last utterances [vv. 44-49]: *Now He said unto them*, ver. 44: *and He said unto them*, ver. 46 [emphasis original]. This inexact form shows clearly that Luke abandons narrative strictly so called, to give[,] as he closes [his gospel,] the contents of the last sayings of Jesus, reserving to himself to develop later [in the Book of Acts] the historical account of those last days...Luke therefore here indicates summarily the substance of the different instructions given by Jesus between His resurrection and ascension all comprised in the words of the Acts: 'After that He had given commandments unto his apostles' (Acts 1:2). Ver. 44 relates how Jesus recalled to them His previous predictions regarding His death and resurrection, which fulfilled

the Scriptures."

44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day..."

It seems that this comparison between John 20:22 and Luke 24:45 provides the solution to the much-debated problem. If the connection between them is valid, then something indeed did happen in this locked room: Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit on them to perform an immediate, specific work on those present. This work was to spiritually enlighten or empower their minds so they could understand the prophetic Scriptures that spoke of him. This would be a work distinct from both regeneration and indwelling, which the Holy Spirit had already performed on them, and also distinct from the empowerment needed by them to fulfill the Great Commission, which the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost would confer.

J. C. Ryle proposed this view in his comments on John 20:22:

Our Lord, in my opinion, must have meant, "Receive the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of knowledge and understanding." He must have meant that He now conferred on them a degree of light and knowledge of divine truth, which hitherto they had not possessed. They had been greatly deficient in light and knowledge up to this time. With all their faith and love toward our Lord's Person, they had been sadly ignorant of many things, and particularly of the true purpose of His coming, and the necessity of His death and resurrection.--"Now," says our Lord, "I bestow on you the Spirit of knowledge. Let the time past suffice to have seen through a glass darkly. Receive the Holy Ghost, open your eyes and see all things clearly."--In fact, I believe the words point to the very thing which, St. Luke says, our Lord did

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prophecies of the O.T." It is to be noted that after giving this analysis, Godet goes on to make the statement regarding v. 45 to be quoted presently in this section.

on this occasion: "then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures." (Luke xxiv.45.)...That this is the true view of the words, is proved to my own mind by the extraordinary difference in doctrinal knowledge which from this day the Apostles exhibited.<sup>65</sup>

Godet expresses this view more succinctly:

Jesus closes these explanations [in Luke 24:44] by an act of power for which they were meant to prepare. He opens the inner sense of His apostles, so that the Scriptures shall henceforth cease to be to them a sealed book. This act is certainly the same as that described by John in the words (20:22): "And he breathed on them, saying, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." The only difference is, that John names the efficient cause, Luke the effect produced.<sup>66</sup>

### The Nature of This Work

Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." What is the nature of this enlightenment? The verb translated "understand" here is συνιεναι, a present active infinitive of the verb συνιημι. According to Arndt and Gingrich, it is used in Luke 24:45 in the sense of "understand, comprehend, gain (an) insight into τὸ something."<sup>67</sup> Craig Blomberg comments as follows:

Of the seventeen occurrences of "understanding" in the RSV NT, ten employ Gk. *syniēmi* or one of its derivatives. Etymologically the verb means "bring together," but in the NT it is used exclusively in a figurative sense for rational or spiritual perception....It can specify a positive, spiritual quality, as when Jesus summarizes the law by the

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65 Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, IV:396-397.

66 Godet, *Commentary on Luke*, p. 510. Godet goes on to state, "The miracle [here in Luke 24:45] is the same as that which Jesus shall one day work upon Israel collectively, *when the veil shall be taken away* (2 Cor. 3:15, 16)" (emphasis original). The analogy drawn by Godet here is probably faulty. The disciples for whom Jesus performed this work in Luke 24:45 were born-again believers. The nation of Israel will be in unbelief when the veil is removed from their eyes, as per Rom. 11:25-26; it is this removal of the veil over their eyes that results in their acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah at his second advent.

67 AG, p. 798.

love commandment, which must involve all one's understanding (Mk. 12:33), or when it is paired with "spiritual wisdom" (Col. 1:9), or when it is set forth as the key to comprehending an important truth (2 Tim. 2:7)....

In sum, the biblical view of understanding involves both cognitive and spiritual perception and results in obedience to God. The ability to understand results from the explicit activity of the God of the Scriptures, in whom all understanding originates and resides.<sup>68</sup>

What was it specifically in Luke 24:45 that Jesus enabled the disciples to understand? Verses 44 and 46, the context that frames verse 45, provide the clue:

44 Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day..."

Jesus, through this work of the Holy Spirit, enabled the disciples to understand the Old Testament,<sup>69</sup> but the context here limits the focus to a specific interpretive problem, namely, Messianic prophecy. Although predicted within the body of that prophecy, the disciples had no concept of a suffering Messiah. Instead, they believed that when the Messiah came, he would immediately overthrow the Gentile powers, reestablish the kingdom of Israel, and rule from the throne of David.

Therefore, by opening their minds Jesus enabled these disciples to understand the essence of Messianic prophecy. The Messianic mission was actually twofold: (1) the Messiah must first bear the sins of his people and die a sacrificial death and then (2) rise from the dead to enter into his glory, which will culminate at the second advent

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68 Craig L. Blomberg, "Understanding," *ISBE*, IV:945.

69 The entire Old Testament is here referred to by Jesus as "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms," using the traditional Jewish threefold division: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and the Writings (*Ketuvim*), from which the common acronym Tanakh comes.

in establishing the Messianic kingdom on earth.

The same misunderstanding of Messianic prophecy is exhibited by the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and Jesus gives them the same summary of its twofold essential feature in Luke 24:25-27:

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

Two earlier incidents prior to the crucifixion show that even when Jesus explained to his disciples that he must first suffer and die, they had not understood him. The first is given in Luke 9:43-45:

But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.

The second is recorded in Luke 18:31-34:

Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of* this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said.

Jesus was not speaking a foreign language when he told his disciples on these two occasions that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, and die. They understood the sentence, but they did not have the spiritual perception to understand how it fit into the Messianic mission as a whole. These strange statements from Jesus were contrary

to everything they expected. As Ryle comments,

We are taught here [in Luke 24:45] that the minds of the disciples had been closed by prejudice and traditional interpretations. Our Lord opened the doors and windows of their minds, and let in the light.<sup>70</sup>

In the Hebrew Scriptures the Holy Spirit had "predicted the sufferings of Messiah and the glories that would follow."<sup>71</sup> But "prejudice and traditional interpretations" of the Old Testament made it difficult to understand both aspects of the Messianic mission. Therefore, it was this twofold mission prophesied in the Old Testament that Jesus in John 20:22/Luke 24:45 opened their minds finally to understand.<sup>72</sup> Peter demonstrates in his first two sermons

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70 Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, II:521. Note, however, that those whose minds are opened here are already believers. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., n.d.; original publication date, 1721), V, at Luke 24:45, has this helpful comment: "Even good men need to have their *understanding opened*; for though they are not *darkness*, as they were by nature, yet in many things they are *in the dark*. David prays, *Open mine eyes* [Ps. 119:18]. *Give me understanding* [Ps. 119:34, 73]" (emphasis original).

71 1 Pet. 1:11.

72 If John 20:22 is interpreted in terms of Luke 24:45 as presented in this chapter, a question must be addressed. If Jesus breathed on those assembled in Jerusalem so that the Holy Spirit came upon them to empower them to understand the Scriptures, in particular the twofold Messianic mission prophesied in the OT, how is the event in Luke 24:25-27 and 32 to be understood? Did Jesus do the same thing for the two travelers when they reached the town of Emmaus? Although not always admitted by theologians, no interpretation of a difficult passage (such as John 20:22) is without its problems. This question does identify a problem, but I submit that overall the interpretation suggested in this chapter has fewer problems associated with it and solves more of the difficulties involved in John 20:22 than its alternatives. With regard to this particular question, there are two possible answers. However, to avoid the appearance of circular reasoning, note that both of these answers are constructed on the basis of the interpretation of John 20:22 proposed in this chapter. They explore whether this view can answer the question posed by vv. 25-27 and 32. (1) Jesus did in fact confer the Holy Spirit on these two men in Emmaus to enable them to understand "the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" that "He explained to them." In support of this explanation, one should note that the same Greek word, *διανοιγω* (*to open*), is used in both vv. 32 and 45. Of course, in v. 32 Jesus "opened" *the Scriptures* (NASB has "explaining the Scriptures"), while in v. 45 he "opened" *their minds*, but this might be an insignificant difference if the end result is taken to be the same. (2) Jesus did not perform the same work in Emmaus as he did later in Jerusalem. In support of this explanation, one should note that the two men for whom Jesus

in Acts 2 and 3 that he did indeed understand these two aspects of King Messiah's mission.<sup>73</sup>

It has already been argued in the section, "Commissioning the Disciples: Verse 21," that the commissioning, Jesus' "breathing," the "receiving" of the Holy Spirit, and the authority to remit and retain sins extended to all in the room, not just the apostles. One question remains: is this receiving of the Holy Spirit with its empowerment to "understand the Scriptures" regarding the Messianic mission extended, as was the empowerment at Pentecost, to all subsequent believers to this day, or was it limited to those in that room with Jesus?

One could argue for such a limitation in view of the fact that this company of believers at this point in time had a special need to explain the sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Messiah to the Jewish population to whom they were about to preach. Thus it would certainly seem likely that this work of enlightenment was extended to Thomas and other disciples who had not been in the room with Jesus on that occasion.<sup>74</sup>

However, Peter in his first letter comments on this very subject, namely, that the prophets predicted first the sufferings of the Messiah followed by his glory:

10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that*

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opened the Scriptures in Emmaus were also present in Jerusalem when he opened their minds (see vv. 33-36). This point, of course, assumes that vv. 44-49 describe the same occasion as vv. 33-43, but then that is one of the components of the interpretation of John 20:22 offered in this chapter. If, then, the two men from Emmaus subsequent to the event in vv. 25-27 received the Holy Spirit and had their *minds* opened, together with the others present, in order to "understand the Scriptures," it must be said that their earlier statement, "our hearts burning within us" (v. 32), was simply the result of their dashed hopes in v. 21 being fully restored after Jesus explained that everything that happened to him had been prophesied in the Scriptures. This effect, however, did not reach the level of fully "understanding" the Scriptures with regard to all the Messianic prophecies. I lean toward explanation (2).

73 See, e.g., Acts 3:18-21. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, III:26, observes that "Peter's mind is now opened by the Holy Spirit to understand the Messianic prophecy and the fulfilment [sic] right before their eyes." Note, however, that Robertson does not state that this opening of Peter's mind took place at John 20:22/Luke 24:45.

74 See also the discussion in footnote 9 of this chapter.

would come to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.<sup>75</sup>

Based on this comment by Peter, it would seem likely that all Christians are knowledgeable about this Messianic issue.

If these two points are correct, the following conclusion is suggested: just as the empowerment to preach the gospel to all nations given when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost is likewise granted to all future believers, so too this special empowerment to understand the essential feature of the Old Testament Messianic prophecy is likewise granted to all future believers. It would be difficult to picture a believer today who does not understand that the first advent of Messiah was to make atonement for sin and that the second advent will be his coming in glory.

But what about other aspects of the Old Testament Scriptures? Any Christian can pray for the Holy Spirit to empower or enlighten him to understand any part or any aspect of the Old Testament. Is this all it takes, then, to understand the Old Testament? Paul writes that

a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.<sup>76</sup>

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75 1 Pet. 1:10-12 (NKJV). The NASB and ESV have a most unfortunate mistranslation of τινα η ποιον καιρον in v. 11. It is not "what person or time." There is only a single issue as object of the search, namely, "time." The phrase should be translated, "searching for what time or for what manner of time." See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Eschatological Hermeneutics of 'Epangelicalism': Promise Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13 (1970):94-95, for a defense of this translation. The prophets did not search diligently to determine what "person" they were talking about. They knew very well they were speaking of the Messiah, the man of promise.

76 1 Cor. 2:14.

Does this statement by Paul about discernment through the Spirit include the enlightenment needed to understand the whole of the Old Testament? Perhaps, but even if it does, this does not mean that the Holy Spirit, when asked for his work of empowerment to understand the Scriptures, enables Christians automatically to know everything there is to know about the Old Testament by simply reading it. These Scriptures still need to be diligently studied. When the Christian prays for the work of the Spirit to open his mind to understand the Old Testament, this work of empowerment simply enables him to understand the meaning of a text through the normal means of exegesis. The Holy Spirit will open his mind so that exegesis will achieve its goal. By contrast, some of the greatest teachings of the Old Testament will elude the scholar if he is an unbeliever.

Ryle argues that

there is not the slightest proof that the apostles alone had their "understandings opened" on the present occasion. On the contrary, the context distinctly tells us that those who were here assembled were the apostles and 'they that were with them.' Moreover, the fact that our Lord opened the understandings of all, is a plain proof that all, whether apostles or not, require teaching from above, and that Christ is able, ready, and willing to give it to all, whether apostles or not, as long as the world stands.<sup>77</sup>

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77 Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, II:521.