

Holy Spirit Guarantees the Christian Inheritance

By Mark Coomer

Every believer is guaranteed an inheritance - the inheritance of the Kingdom of God - which will be bestowed at Jesus Christ's return. This future inheritance is guaranteed by the seal with which God now marks each Christian - the Holy Spirit:

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, which is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13,14).

The Holy Spirit is the deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until we, who are God's possessions, are redeemed by Him and granted administrative positions with Messiah in the Kingdom of God (Rev. 5:10; Tim. 2:12; etc.).

Ancient Israel Anticipated the Spirit

Many years before the Holy Spirit sealed each believer, God promised Abraham and his offspring this inheritance. God gave Abraham's descendants, the Israelites, a sign to watch for, so that they would know when their inheritance was near. This sign would be the Spirit of God poured out on all those who obey God:

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire, and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors [remnant] whom the LORD calls (Joel 2:28-32; cp. Ezek. 36:25-30, 39:29; Isa. 32:15, 59:21; Zech. 12:10).

God revealed to the prophet Joel that "in those days" before the "Day of the LORD," the day of Israel's deliverance and redemption into its inheritance, He

would pour out His Spirit on the minority of Israelites, the remnant, who faithfully serve Him.

Every descendant of Abraham understood that his inheritance would include eternal life in an age of permanent peace and prosperity under God's rulership in the land which He had promised to give them. According to the prophet Joel,

Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her. In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD's house and will water the valley of acacias. Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations (Joel 3:17, 18, 20).

We can easily understand why faithful Israelites eagerly awaited the arrival of God's Spirit in preparation for the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' Disciples Receive the Spirit

But the sign did not appear until after Jesus, their Messiah, had ascended into heaven about two thousand years after the promise to Abraham. The Apostles and others who followed Jesus were the first to be filled with the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast of Pentecost:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

Curious bystanders gathered around as Peter explained that this event fulfilled the expectations which the prophets had instilled in Israel since ancient times.

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my

servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heaven above and on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' (Acts 2:16-21).

Peter declared that this outpouring of the Spirit was the sign for which Israel had long been waiting. The last days of this age had arrived at last. Israel's promised inheritance which would accompany the day of the Lord, was near.

Jesus Prepared Israel to Receive the Spirit

Peter naturally knew the meaning of these things since he was a student of Jesus Christ. Jesus' basic teaching was that the Kingdom of God, the coming age of Israel's deliverance, was near at hand. Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus was constantly preparing his people to receive the soon-coming Spirit of God about which the prophets had spoken:

On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me. And let him drink, who believes in me. As the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:37-39, NIV margin. See also John 3:3-10; 4:21-26; 7:37-39; 14:15-26; 16:7-15; 20:22-23; Acts 1:8, 2:33).

Jesus declared that he was the prophesied Messiah of Israel who would administer the Spirit to those who believe in him. But the Spirit was not yet given because Jesus had not yet ascended to the right hand of God in Heaven, from whence he would pour out the gift.

After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus gave his disciples final instructions concerning the coming Kingdom of God. He reminded them of that which he had spoken so often before, that is, God's promised gift of the Holy Spirit:

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4,5; cp. Lk.24:49).

A few days later, on the day of Pentecost, Jesus poured out the Spirit (Acts 2:32, 33) just as he had promised.

"Even the Gentiles" Receive the Spirit

The Apostles knew that the gift of the Holy Spirit, the pledge of their future inheritance, had arrived in the final days of this age, before the great Day of the Lord, when God would usher in His Kingdom. What they did not understand until some years later, however, was that God had planned to include the Gentiles among the inheritors of this Kingdom. This secret was revealed to Peter. While preaching to the Gentiles, he observed them receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in the same manner as the Jews had at Pentecost years before. He later reported this experience to the church in this way:

As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them [Gentiles] as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the gift he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God? When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life" (Acts 11:15-18).

To the Jewish believers, "repentance unto life" meant repentance with a view to gaining life in the coming age of Israel's restoration when Messiah would rule the earth from Jerusalem.

After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them:

"Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for

he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are" (Acts 15:6-11).

Notice carefully that before the introduction of Gentiles into Christ, the doctrine of salvation by faith, without the yoke of the law, is already firmly in place. The believers who had accompanied Jesus during his earthly ministry knew that "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). God no longer makes any distinction between Jew or Gentile believers. The Holy Spirit is given freely to all who believe Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom (Mk. 1:14, 15). The "blessing given to Abraham" is now available to the Gentiles through faith:

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14).

The "blessing given to Abraham" is "the land God gave Abraham (Gen.28:4). The believing Gentiles also received the "promise of the Spirit," which is the token of inheritance with Israel. The Apostle Paul, who had received from Christ a special ministry (*oikonomia*, Eph. 3:12) to the Gentiles, explained this to them clearly:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, which is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13, 14).

Gentiles also are now included in Christ when they believe. As a result, they too are counted as Abraham's children, and they too will receive the same inheritance according to the same promises. Paul the Apostle expresses it this way:

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:29).

The "last days" of the Holy Spirit

One question remains: If the coming of the Holy Spirit marks the beginning of the "last days" before the Day of the Lord spoken of by the prophet Joel, why have nearly two thousand years passed without the establishment of the Kingdom of God? Why hasn't the sun "turned to darkness and the moon to blood?" Once again Peter has the answer:

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:3, 4, 8, 9).

These words, written by Peter near the close of his life, remind us of the command he gave to those who believed his words on that day of Pentecost long ago, when they asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

May this be our counsel also to those who inquire about our faith.

[Mark Coomer has written an excellent research paper entitled *The Church: The Israel of God* which he will be glad to mail to anyone interested. He can be reached at: Mark Coomer, P.O. Box 2292 Evansville, IN 47728 or by e-mail at: mscoomer@evansville.net]